# THE CANDLE AND THE WIND

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY
## OF
## OBI BARTH OYIBO THOMPSON

# The Candle
## And
# The Wind

***Figure 1***: *My first house from 1967 - 1982 in Umuohuhu, Ekerifeze, Umuajata*

***Figure 2**: 1967: Officer Cadet, School of Infantry, Eastern Command Nigerian Army Enugu*

***Figure 3**: My Second house from 1982 - 1993 in Umuohuhu, Ekerifeze, Umuajata*

***Figure 4:*** *My Mother's picture taken in June 1956*

***Figure 5**: My Father's picture taken in 1955/56*

***Figure 6**: My picture taken on April 10, 2025*

# INTRODUCTION OF EMESIOBI (OBI) BARTH OYIBO THOMPSON AND HIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY - "THE CANDLE AND THE WIND"

Oyibo, thank you for honouring me with the assignment to introduce your good self and your autobiography.

Oyibo is a popular name in Olokoro and is widely being internalized beyond Olokoro and Umuahia.

**Who is Oyibo?**

He is the last son of Da Onyebeke who people call Maabo or Mama Oyibo. Oyibo was born on 9th May, 1945. He is a carbon copy of his father - Chief Thompson Wogu of old Umuahia. I knew Oyibo eighty (80) years ago as I was four (4) years older. I could see in my mind's eye little Oyibo whose eyes, hair and colour were unique.

His mother was a good friend of my mum - Abigail Nwabunka Umeh (Da Abi) who she called "Nwuyi Nwanem". Arising from this special relationship between the two (2) mothers, Oyibo and I became and have remained close. Da Onyebeke was very fond of me and called me "Obi Dede". As an intercity commerce trader, who traded in uha, claypots, dry fish and crayfish between Port Harcourt and Umuahia, she usually asked me to

accompany Oyibo to Old Umuahia railway station (Halt) to help her bring back her goods - thanks be to God there were no kidnappers nor ritual killers. We were rather too young then.

Oyibo, though very brilliant was afraid of primary school because of teachers and their cane. But when he started to show interest in school nothing could hold him back. Inspite of his brilliance, always being first in class, getting distinction in his First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC), he could not secure any financial support from anybody including the government of Eastern Nigeria for his secondary school education. To me this was worrisome.

In one of the days in 1964 when I visited home from Advanced Teacher's College (ATTC) Owerri, now Alvan Ikoku College of Education Owerri, I went across as usual to see Da Onyebeke and Oyibo as my visiting routine was. As he (Oyibo) was seeing me off, I asked to know what he was doing in the village. Hear him, "you know I did not go to secondary school, but I want to take London GCE exams. I do not have the money, which is 10.60 pounds." Listening to him was painful, so I immediately asked him to follow me home since I could pay the said amount from my UNESCO book subscription allowance. I decided there and then to give him coaching in English language - Lexus and Structure, Composition, Comprehension etc. I found his composition so well written that I was proud to give his essays to my secondary school students (I was on teaching

practice) to read what a primary school pupil who did not see the four walls of a secondary school nor had a home teacher could write. He performed excellently in the London GCE exams, which qualified him for recruitment into the Biafran Army Officer's Corps during the Nigerian Biafran war and after the war enabled him to do higher school (A levels) at Federal Government College (FGC) Sokoto.

Being a very ambitious and intelligent boy though without financial help, he took risks and found himself in Switzerland where he combined education with car business. Eventually, Oyibo courageously relocated to the United States of America (US) - the land of opportunities where he graduated. Having now been equipped academically and financially, he returned to Nigeria to do his National Youth Service Corps (NYSC). On completing his service year, he returned to the US.

In 1988, Oyibo finally returned to Nigeria to explore business opportunities. This was when he invited me to join him at Adeniyi Jones Ikeja to help put him through the work culture in Federal Public Services System since I was with the Federal Public Service as a Director. This exposure enabled him to have several television and radio discussions on several federal service programmes. The interfacing brought him close to top federal civil servants including ministers, permanent secretaries, directors, director generals etc.

I have one name for Oyibo, and the name is "hidden heights". Coincidentally, this is the same name he uses to describe his Umudere mansion. Oyibo on the surface is genial and simple but deep inside he is complex but well-rounded. He may be fifty years ahead of you in a subject matter you thought you knew, so be sure of your facts before you meet him for your "important discussions" because with your expertise he could disable you intellectually.

A German writer once said that the best discussion is the one where you understand what was not said. What about the best book? What is it? We have before us today Obi Thompson's autobiography "The Candle and the Wind". It is not in my place to tell you whether or not this is the best book you have read or about to read. It is up to you to make the decision from its many commendables such as well laid out and instructive subject matters presented in good English. I have seen the author's challenge to authority in this book, what many call "speaking truth to power." I am convinced Oyibo is not afraid of power. I have been excited by Oyibo's fight against corruption even at the level of the highest court in Nigeria (Supreme court). Even at the risk of losing his case, he had no intention to compromise with injustice. Oyibo is a great lesson in human relationship and in the concept of tomorrow. You must be circumspect about tomorrow because it never ends, rather it is pregnant, and nobody knows what it will give birth to.

There are several chapters in the book which have showcased Oyibo as a no-nonsense and fearless Nigerian. These are the characteristics that define his view of life, what some people call author's philosophy of life or world view.

Whatever Oyibo is today is the price of diligence. The bible says that diligence is the power behind success and progress, whilst poverty is driven by slothfulness, gossip and talkativeness.

To me, Oyibo's autobiography is an embodiment of knowledge and history. It showcases his generation up to four generations before him. He knows who he is.

I recommend his autobiography to researchers, the academia, administrators, students and everybody because the book is insightful. I will not end this introduction without mentioning how my poem "the undying spirit" in my book "Rhythm of Conscience" pages 195 to 196, first published in 2005 and revised in 2022, reflects Oyibo's life. This poem is a summary of Oyibo. Whatever I have written is the result of intense study and research on Oyibo for 80 years.

**Philip Umeh**

*Written on this 24th day of April, 2025.*

## "Undying Spirit" by Philip Umeh

Though cradled in thatches

Teetered in coldness

Nestled in poverty

Fed with dietic imbalance

Hounded by deprivations

Clothed in Adamic best

Yet you refuse to give up

Being the undaunted Gibraltar

Never succumbing to the negative whims of fate

Deprived, Pilloried, Harassed, Denied, Marginalized,
Victimized, Labelled, Impugned, Ruled out of reckoning,

In their own imagination

Yet your undying spirit remains

The unshakable Iroko

The mind-set of the final arbiter

Undying spirit, Hero in the battle of survival,

Marshalling weapons of Heroism: Courage,
Determination, Endurance, Diligence, Honesty, Love
with malice to none

To maintain the bliss and rest

That follow efforts and success.

The undying spirit

Never gives up

Never afraid to try

Daring and resolute

Bold, confident and sure

No matter rivals or distractors, system or culture, white or black

Remains a winner

Undying spirit never dies

Remains forever

As the regenerative enigma

Embarrassing poverty, stocktaking period for unbelieving peers

As rising higher by bootstraps to heavenly heights

From nothingness to our man of the moment

We are your aspirants

**Philip Umeh :** “Rhythm of Conscience” pages 195 to 196, first published in 2005 and revised in 2022.

# THE CANDLE AND THE WIND

*Autobiography of Obi Barth Oyibo Thompson*

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Published by Interstella Communications Limited.
Umuahia, Nigeria

ISBN: 978-978-778-365-8

*The Candle and the Wind:* Autobiography of Emesieobi (Obi) Barth Oyibo Thompson, is a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and its capacity to surge and soar even beyond the spares, despite the thickness of fogs.

# DEDICATION

To the unwavering Hope and Perseverance that have guided my journey.

To my mother, whose boundless love and support have been my beacon in times of darkness.

To my Children: Dike, Chioma, Amara and Nnabugwu, who insisted that this must be written.

To all the brave young people everywhere striving to takedown the odds placed on their way.

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This was a very difficult undertaking. It was very difficult tunnelling through a seemingly very remote past archived in unconscious realms of the mind, to recapture events as they happened. I owe this more to Emesieobi and Oyibo than to Obi Thompson. He has been an exceptionally trusted, reliable and faithful friend under unimaginable circumstances.

# PREFACE

*A raging Inferno?*
*No.*
*It is only a gentle dim ray of a frail and faltering candlelight*
Lit in the midst of a Tropical Wilderness

Exposed and unprotected from ferocious storms, rainfalls and floods
---
The Ever Threatening Forces that vowed of its Extinction ---
It may have sometimes even blinked
But never bowed or entirely overcome and put out.

*A Story of the Life of our Star*

Of how each circle of adverse forces of Nature
Became its fuel and friend
And over time the tiny spark ignited by the Unknown
Defied the hurricane's fury
And a fragile flame, flickering in the eye of the ever-raging storm
Danced with reckless abandon
To shine brighter than the brightest constellation.

*A Story of how our Star* ---
A gentle flash of light
Lit in its mother's blessed womb
*In its Dance Against the Rhythm and Fury of Adversaries*
--- Became Quasar, the Star of the constellation Virgo
An Eternal Light beyond the Milky Way Galaxy
Beyond the gaze of Men
Ever illuminating the firmament
Dancing with the Universe

In an Eternal Relay Over Space and Time
Holding the baton
That shall be passed on from one generation to the another
Hanging high up there in the firmament
A timeless Monument of Faith and Fate
And the Mysteries ever around us
Which only Men with Eyes can see.

*A Tale in Time*
*Of How A vulnerable flickering light*
Even against the whims and fury of the Storm
*Persevered, burning brighter with each gust*
*Until it outshone all in the firmament* ---
Proof certain of a Hand that works miracles
Evidence of a God beyond Man.

*The Story of how a Lone Ember*
Nurtured by its Mother's Gentle Breath of Hope
*Blazed into a Radiant Star*
Silencing forever the menacing threat of Darkness
A hostile voice that even in whispers blew nothing else than foul air
As a heralded to the birth of our innocent Star
Threatening its Eternal Eclipse.

*Oh, a Story of the Blind Clairvoyance of Men*
Who in their Vaunted Wisdom and Prophesy ---
In their hubris and arrogance
--- Saw nothing else than gloom and doom
As prediction of how our Star will end its rude sojourn
In a firmament meant only for their stars and moons
And were fooled and unable to foresee foretell
That the weak flicker of light
Even when on the brink

Was beyond the malice of little minds in heels of the affairs Men

And could not foresee
The vigour with our Star surged forth with grace and radiance
Eclipsing the combined brilliance of its celestial companions.

And the tiny spark
Though threatened by the tempest's wrath
Adapted, evolved, and exploded
To become a resplendent Star
Captivating the cosmos
In a race whose winner is decided by the Divine.

*A Story how a lone flicker*
Born In the hostile maelstrom's depths and Pit of Darkness
Took flight and ascended to the Realm of the Stars
Where it shall forever shine
As a Beacon of Hope
For all those still under the Threats and Tyranny of Despair
That indeed, I, your kindred Spirit can verily affirm:
That a Weak Lone Spark
Forged in the Heart of a ferocious and furious Storm
Can emerge stronger
And its luminescence transcending the turmoil
To reign supreme and command the Storms
To the glory of the Ever Glorious.

Oh yes, and to Its glory
The tiny flickering flame
Nursed by the storm's fierce breath
Can grow in strength
And ultimately outshine the Darkness ---
Ever Radiant, Resplendent, and forever Free.

# INTRODUCTION

I have in my moments of extreme anxiety and distress felt vulnerable, confused, threatened, and desperate. Like most humans would in such circumstances, I wondered why I should be so tested. I had looked up to the Heavens and asked, *why,* not necessarily seeking explanation or insight, but rather in disappointment and even as a protest. Then a friend (not a clergyman) referred me to what is written in the Christian Bible at *2 Corinthians 1:3-4*, where God is described as the *Father of all Comfort*, "who comforts us in all in our troubles, so that we can comfort those in trouble, with the same comfort we ourselves received from God". The text counsels and demands from those of us who God has given the *privileged ears* to hear at such frequencies, to *tune in*, and listen to the heartbeat of the Universe where every individual cry and prayer is received and beamed back to us, who still dwell on God's Earth – the prayers of our fellow Men, often said in lonely whispers in moments of pains, sadness, and near-despair, and sometimes even with a feeling of shame and guilt. Man, and society fail to realise that indeed, often, God works miracles; but only through Its agents who It has

positioned to so act, in response to the prayers said by our fellow human beings, in their moments of need --- particularly the prayers of a child seeking the blessing of no more than basic suffrage. Though we have the means to act, often we fail. We act deaf, when the Universe whispers an uncomfortable verse into our ears. We thereby challenge It, to take matters into Its hands, where Man ought to have (acted).

In the lyrics of his Song: *In the Ghetto,* Elvis Presley narrates an unfortunately often common and familiar story thus:

"As the snow flies
On a cold and grey Chicago morn'
A poor little baby child is born
In the ghetto

And his mama cries
For if there is one thing she don't need
Its another little hungry mouth to feed
In the ghetto

People don't you understand
The child needs a helping hand
Or he'll grow to be an angry young man, some day
Take a look at you and me
Are we too blind to see

Or do we simply turn our heads and look away?...".

In my experience, society often does not only turn and look the other way. It may even resent your temerity to ask for something better than you were handed. Society thinks your prayers and aspiration threaten their comforts and privileges as established order ordained by their god.

But it is not.

The difference between me and that poor little baby child born on that cold and grey winter morning in Chicago is in the choices we made. The two Societies --- mine in Umuahia, , and his in Chicago United states of America --- did exactly the same thing. It is for that sole reason that I write this book, nothing else. Perhaps the hours I spent struggling to recall events exactly as the happed many years ago, events I rather not worry remember this late in life --- may help one poor little child or young man in the same circumstances somewhere, this day *Today*.

It is strictly for that sole reason and purpose that I write this book, nothing else.

My life is a testimony of the Timeless Causality, the intervention of Higher Powers to intrude on the Affairs of Men, when Men abdicate their solemn duties --- to care for the less-privileged, even as they live in the abundance

provided, not necessarily as a righteous wage, but by It, who owns *all there are*. I saw it *Yesterday*, and profess it *Today* without the garb of clairvoyance, as it indeed shall always be the case, the hope that must arise, even when it has no reason, which by itself defies all logic, *a hope of hope, when despair is not a choice*.

Looking back at all I can remember, from my birth to my present age, I can understand why today some of my friends, my fellow amateur Astronomy enthusiasts, often describe me as a *Star without a parallax*, the rare phenomenon of our Universe, a star of blazing brightness from nowhere, often casting a shadow, displacing in the firmament other objects whose positions, orbits or trajectories, were more understood and predictable. But where the intruder or *rogue star* came from, nobody can explain. More perplexing, in this case, is that this star is not a Shooting Star, not a meteor, a comet, or an asteroid. Nor is it aurora borealis, or the northern lights. It is not one of the known objects that suddenly appear on the night sky with amazing beauty, wonder and luminescence, only to disappear before you get a telescope or camera.

This particular Star, *The Candle and The Wind,* simply refuses to disappear like millions in its *Class*. Night after Night, Storm after Storm, it appears constant, as if it is suspended on every night sky by an *Unknown force of the*

*Universe*. An unknown phenomenon becomes a gravitational force in the Universe, and by itself a seed of structural formation, a Sun of a galaxy without pedigree, disrupting the Known-*Order* of the *Known Universe*.

I understand both the simile and the discomfort and confusion, the *Strange or Intruder Star* may cause my fellow amateur Astronomy enthusiasts, the ardent observers of every celestial Night Show; and all the others, whose anxiety and curiosity are exuberated by lack of explanation for the baffling phenomenon. It defies our curiosity. *The Origin of The Candle and The Wind* cannot be traced to the ancestry of any of the known *seeds of structural formation* that evolved in the Universe following the violent birth of our native and familiar *Milky way galaxy* and solar system, even if we must stretch our search to Andromeda, our nearest neighbour in the infinite cosmos.

Let us not labour in vain like the Magi of old. It suffices that *A Star is Born*. It has its planets and other heavenly bodies whose orbits are defined and governed, not by the known laws of Physics, but by laws handed them by this Star, *The Candle and The Wind*. Each planet of human generations shall be confined to its assigned orbit. They shall create their days and nights, seasons and weather conditions for their temporary dwellers in each spacetime. This *Star* is faithfully constant, as has been our familiar

Sun of the Milky way galaxy since its birth by the Big Bang. But *The Candle and The Wind* is only a metaphoric Sun or *Star,* a living paradox and antimony. Indeed, it is only a Quantum of Dark Energy, an invisible and non-observable existence, whose presence can only be inferred from the effects it exerts on yet other unknown objects somewhere in the boundless enormity of the Cosmo, where the fate of our known galaxies is determined --- whether they will end in a fireball, a terrifying horror of nature like how their violent existence began almost 40 billion years ago; or be frozen to death, as they hastily accelerate away, far beyond their various Suns.

Yes, before our own eyes, as the Queen of Glory in all Night Skies, the Ever-Effulgent Moon, led the parade of all celestial objects, and in fealty loyalty, danced around their Stars, the Universe birthed a different Star, in an alien neighbourhood of space, so impenetrably dark before that *Moment*, that men deemed it doomed to eternal darkness.

My 80 years so far on this Planet have been an incredibly amazing journey. Viewed now from sufficient height, through a lens that compresses time, it seems a short ride for thrills on an almost zero-gradient free-fall roller coaster. The speed, from-the-bottom-to-the apex, back to bottom, and back up to the apex once more --- a cycle that

repeated over and over --- is so fast that the observer is dizzied, confused, and often disoriented. So too is the rider. Recklessly indulging in such apparently dangerous sport, a game meant only for the desperate of humanity --- *the Down at Dawn* --- who have nothing else to fear, even should noonday choose to offer nothing else than the familiar floor as a ceiling in pit of the abyss. It is my fervent prayer that such does not continue to be the choice of many of my kind --- *the desperate Down-and-Dawn at-Sunrise, for whom it may seem the Universe has unjustly rigged the game against them, tilted its playing field on an axis so unjust that their climb is unfairly too steep. But climb, they must. And* they must also muster enough octane, to drive the necessary dose of adrenaline.

# MY LINEAGE

I don't know much about my father and his people. All I know is that his name is Thompson WOGU of Umuobutu Old Umuahia (or Umuibeji) of Olokoro. At the time of writing, I have limited knowledge of the great *Wogu Dynasty (*as indeed my paternal grandfather created). The Wogus of my father's and grandfather's time were the eagles among the birds. Until recently (1979 to 1985) when I made contact with Dr. Udo Wogu in Los Angeles, I had little or no connection to them. I understand that my father's mother, my paternal grandmother, was from Ekerifeze Umuajata Olokoro. But there the trail ends. She was dead by the time I was born.

I remember seeing my father thrice. The first two of such luxuries was before I was six years old. I remember asking why him he named me *Aja,* mere sand. I remember that he did not explain. He simply looked at me and smiled, not really a happy smile. Then he said I was too young to understand. When I insisted, he put his right hands into his pocket and brought out a three pence coin and handed it to Ezekiel, one of the house-helps, to buy *Akara* for me while he rubbed my head with his left hand and asked me to go with Ezekiel to buy some *Akara.*

My mother was smiling and said nothing. Of course, she knew I would come to her to answer the question my father just avoided.

My father was then a *Chief Court Clerk* in the Colonial Administration. That may be why everyone called him *Chief*. I thought then that it was his other name, Chief Thompson, Chief Wogu. One thing was clear to me then: People were deferring to my father. I noticed that almost everyone was reverent towards him, except me. I did not understand why it seemed, to my child mind, that everyone obeyed him. Perhaps it was because a Chief Court Clerk was a respected position for a black man then, in the 1940s and early 1950s. My mother later told me that he replaced a white man in that position. I guess it was a big deal then. All that did not mean much to me. All I cared was for was to see him at the end of the day. I remember that a man in khaki uniform, a *Court Man*, carried his bag whenever he was coming home from work. As I recall it, I felt he was very affectionate towards me during those days when I must have been under age seven. My meetings with him later left me really confused. He had about three wives by then, and many other children, though only my mother and I lived with him. Sometimes, my mother brought me to see him after she had left him and returned because my mother was away from my HOME at Umuajata, Olokoro. During those visits, I felt I was an embarrassing and unnecessary excess baggage he did not need. During such short visits, my father never for one moment, even for a second, had *a one-on- one* conversation with me. He never asked me about my school. One of such visits was in 1955, when I was about

ten. All he did was tell a tailor who was making school uniforms for *his other children,* to include me. I received two pairs of school uniform: khaki shorts and white shirts. Thereafter, I was sent on my way back to my mother. I was a very sensitive precocious child. Even at age ten as I was then, I vowed not to go back there, no matter what. There ended our relationship on this Earth, during this incarnation. Perhaps, there is another realm, another Time, where we can meet again. I am sure we both will try to make it a little better for each other. Till this day, I keep wondering how he felt at his dying moments: did he remember me? Did he pray for me? I don't know. My mother did her best to convince that that my father loved me. She told me that my father was a stubborn person who would never backdown, no matter how much pain a (wrong) decision may be causing him. I guess I was only being exactly what he would expect from a son that was every bit of him.

I grew up with my mother, among her people; and I understand a lot more of that side of my lineage; and it is there that I belong: my proud roots and heritage, from which I developed a sense of who I am -- my sense of human decency and dignity.

My mother's father was Eluwa, whose father was Ebubeogu, of Umueke Ekerifeze in Umuajata Olokoro. They had small holdings of ancestral farmlands, and nothing else. But they were of quite a proud, honest and hard-working stock, and even arrogant. As a child, I got used to hearing them tell-off somebody who dared show off or flaunt his wealth before them,

a trait my mother wholly inherited (and most likely passed to me), a trait of never allowing anybody parade himself before me as a superior being, just because he has a bit more of the vegetable called material things, than I have.

My maternal grandmother's name is Oyidie, a name given to her by my maternal grandfather, Eluwa, as was the custom in those days. She was from Umuruohiri in Umuajata. She was named Udumejemba at birth by her parents. But in those days, your husband could give you any name he liked; so she became known as Oyidie where she was married, and as Udumejemba, at Umuruohiri, where she was born (in the same village). Her mother, my maternal great grandmother, is a daughter of a man called Onyeobia from Umuoparazara Olokoro. The name of my grandmother's father was Adighiogu, the grandfather of the present Eze of Umuajata Autonomous Community (2025), HRH Eze Patrick Obioma Ofor. His (the Eze's) father, Ofor, who I called Dede Ofor, is one of the sons of Adighiogu, including Adindu, one of whose sons was De-Godwin. De- Godwin has a sister called Nwaotuo (Da- Nwaotuo as I call her). She is married at Umuebebe Amizi Olokoro to one Ewerike. Her only son, Chibuzor, died at age 36. Chibuzor has children, but I do not know them. I tried to take care of Da- Nwaotuo. She died a few years ago. Like most of my mother's relatives, Da- Nwaotuo was a very caring and affectionate human being. I remember that anytime she saw me when I was a child, she always gave me something, be it *jigbo ocha* with palmnut carnels, or groundnuts.

My maternal grandmother had three sons that I knew of, and three daughters. I was told that one of the three sons left for Lagos in the early 1940s and never came back. I did not know him. The eldest son was Okalanwolu. I remember him vaguely. He was always loving towards me. He named me *Nnaa*. And I called him *Nnaa* too. I guess we were just pals, calling each other by a nickname. But he died before I was five. I. still remember that day, how he lay there, still on a bamboo bed. I was quite confused to see everyone crying. I thought that my Nnaa was just sleeping, and I wondered why everyone was yelling. It seemed rude to disturb Nna in his sleep. All her life, my mother missed him so much.

The only surviving son of my grandmother was called Ejikeme Amos Eluwa who was a surrogate father to me. He had two sons, Obioma (Obi) and Chibuike (Chubby, who I nicknamed Tube, while he calls me Uzi). Obi, the elder son, was slaughtered at Bukuru in Northern Nigeria during one of the Hausa-Fulani ethnic cleansing of Igbos in 1966, a sport that has been going on since the British brought people with nothing in common together and welded them together into a nation called Nigeria. Chubby is the father of Okechukwu , Kelechi, and Ugochukwu; and three girls: Chinwe (late), Uzoamaka and Ugonma.

My grandmother had three daughters of whom my mother, Onyebueke ELUWA, was the eldest (and until I became a man, the most unfortunate). Next to her was Nkejieme (named Comfort by her husband, Solomon Nwaeze of Umuogba Amizi Olokoro). She had two children, Chimezie Peter (son), and Gold (daughter). De-Chimezie died in a road accident at Umuahia on 28th December 1976 on his way to Lagos. He was a very kind man. Most of my life up to my teenage years, the clothes I wore were handed down to me by De-Chemezie. He was the father of Aham and two daughters: Chinwe and Ogechi.

My grandmother's last child and daughter was named Titi (Mama Titi, as I called her). She died in 1954, a day I remember very clearly. My mother was carrying her when she died. It was the first time I really saw a dead body. I was nine. I was terrified, seeing my mother lying beside her dead sister. I could not let my mother touch me because I felt insecure and feared that she might also decide to die, and leave me lonely and alone, as her sister just did. I was concerned because I saw that her baby sister, Mama Titi, had simply left her six children and decided to go away forever. I could not understand that she had no say in the matter. She loved me very much and I felt very close to her. She was married to a man called Benjamine Ubani at Umuigwe Amakama Olokoro, just a few feet away from my present residence. Of her six children (three boys and three girls), only Ndubueze (De-Ndubueze) her first son, and her last daughter, Chibuzor, still live. We buried Ada, the first daughter, in 2024 at Udi, the husband's home. De-Ndubueze has two boys and three

girls: Chukwudi and Chima (males), Ogechi and Amarachi (females) but one of the girls, Igbeaku, died in 2005.

The other son of my auntie, Mama Titi, was late Chukwumaobi Benson. He was a Police Inspector before his death. He was married to a lady called Dika. His children are: Enyinnaya (male), Comfort, Chinyere, Oluchi and Ijeoma (females). Dika died just a few years ago.

# Biography Of My Mother

**(Mama, Maabo, our Matriarch:**
**Madam Abigail Onyebueke Eluwa).**

Knowing who my mother was, her background, and what she went through, is the only compass for anyone who wants to undertake the uncertain and complex venture of trying to *Understand Me.* Everything I tried to do with my life was in essence to compensate her for the cruelty she suffered, and to never do anything that would cause her pains, shame and anxiety. I append here below in verbatim, her Biography, exactly as written and read by me, at her funeral on 15th September 2001.

"Mama was born about the year 1906, to the family of Eluwa Ebubeogu (father) and his wife, Oyiridiya Udumejemba, daughter of Adighiogu of Umuruohiriri (mother), all in Umuajata Olokoro.

Her family was poor; and as was the tradition in those days, she was subjected to two childhood marriages (the first at the age of nine!), against which she rebelled in each case, and ran back to her family. However, whenever she ran back, the creditors would demand a refund of whatever sums they had paid to her family for her being *be-trothed* or *married* to the lender's child or relation. It was therefore necessary for her family to either send her back to the creditor's family against her wish or find someone else to refund the money paid by the previous 'husband' and thereby acquire her as a 'wife'. It need not be said

that under such circumstances; her childhood was not exactly a happy one.

Over the years, she developed into puberty; and through another arrangement, she was married to one Egwuekweh of Mbarama Okwu Olokoro, who actually wanted her to be a farm hand and a maid to his first wife. Two children, Joshua and Monday, were born out of that relationship, before she once again rebelled and ran back to her family with her two infant boys. Mr. Egwuekwe tried to bully his way into my mother's family with all sorts of threats, including killing her, if she did not come back or have his money refunded immediately. But by this time however, her two elder brothers were grown young men, who could defend her physically. They resisted the attempt by Mr. Egwuekwe to abduct her. They also refused to refund the dowry, arguing that the two little children born in that *marriage* needed to be fed and taken care of, which Mr Egwuekwe was not doing. Seeing that physical force could not avail him his objective, he took the matter to court. During the trial, my mother amazed the magistrate with her intelligence and gave vivid description of the blood-chilling and dehumanizing abuses she suffered in the hands of Egwuekwe and his wife. The court consequently ordered that the so-called dowry need not be refunded until her family could afford to do so; and that she should not go back to that so-called marriage against her wish.

Ironically, it was during the trials at that court, that she met a man on her own, Chief Thompson Wogu, of Umuobutu Old

Umuahia, who at that time was the Court Clerk at the colonial County Court of *Odida Anyanwu* Umuahia, and who also participated in hearing the case.

Chief Thompson Wogu promptly offered to refund the dowry, in order to make sure Mr. Egwuekwe had no excuse to further harass my mother. Thereafter, my mother lived with him. I was brought into this world through that union.

I was born on 9th May 1945 at Umuohuhu, Ekerifeze Umuajata. My mother named me Emesieobi, which I abbreviated to Obi. My father upon hearing of my birth, came to Umuohuhu with his double barrel gun and released a few shots, and there and then named me Aja, a name I can't remember anybody calling me since I was eleven. I do not know exactly why Oyibo stuck to me as my first name. All my mother told me is that I was the closest to a white European baby many people had seen at that time: my eye colour, hair, and complexion. Whatever their reason was, Oyibo, perhaps a pet name that was not given to me by my parents, became my public identity. I became Bartholomew on my Baptism Day in 1955/56 --- I don't really care for the exact date. In the Christian tradition, everyone is *born again* to non-African parents the day you take the first sacrament of redemption. The message is loud and clear.

Shortly after I was born, my father was transferred to Bende. He insisted that my mother should come along, even though he was unwilling to be encumbered with my mother's two children from

Mr. Egwuekwe because he already had five children of his own from previous marriages (a few more followed). I was his sixth child at that time. My mother had to decide either to abandon her two other children and proceed with me and my father to his new posting, or stay with her family, thereby forfeit the comfort and security she was enjoying in my father's house. After thinking it over, she decided that she would rather go back to the squalor in her family, and suffer poverty with her two children, instead of abandoning them for a comfortable life with my father. So, she chose to raise her three boys (which included me), as a single mother. As she narrated it to me, my father made it clear that he would wash his hands of me and her, if she chose not to accompany him. He was not known for idle threats, and this was no exception. But my mother, even at age 24 then, was not a woman who looks back, once her mind is made up, no matter what. I think I cannot deny that both of them, my mother and my father, did not cheat each other in their equal chromosomal contribution that genetically manifested in this aspect of my character.

However, my mother was not disappointed by the magnitude of suffering she had anticipated would inherently come her way, consequent upon the decision she made. It was under the dire circumstances she faced that she became the first woman from Olokoro to engage in inter-city commerce: buying *uha* and clay pots in Umuahia and selling them in Port Harcourt; and buying dry fish and crayfish in Port Harcourt and selling them in Umuahia on her return trip. In every sense of it, she was the

undisputed female pioneer of modern commerce in Olokoro, albeit at a petty scale, due to capital constraints. It is to her eternal credit that in Olokoro, she was the first woman to singlehandedly educate her son (Monday) to complete elementary school, though he failed the final Elementary School Certificate Examination in 1950 (which brought her a lot of sadness and distress). Perhaps it was as a result of the anguish I watched her suffer, following Monday's failure, that I developed a dreadful hatred, and phobia, for failure at anything I undertake in life. Certainly, as a child, I resolved to console her, where both Joshua and Monday had failed her.

She will be eternally remembered as the Soul and Matriarch of the descendants of Emesieobi (Obi) Barth Oyibo THOMPSON: a structure she single-handedly created on a solid foundation of sheer hard work, sweat and tears, honesty, determination, courage, faith and fear of God, humility and dignity. Perhaps, it was also of the inevitability of the death of her kind that St. Paul spoke, when he wrote Timothy, stating thus:

> *"For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me on that day; and not to me only, but also unto all them that love his appearing". 2 Timothy 4: 6 – 8*

Her contribution to posterity, her imprints in the sands of Time, SHALL, and will, endure far beyond her, even unto ETERNITY".

Also appended here below is the eulogy, titled *An Ode to Our Matriarch,* intended to be read by my daughter, Chioma, at my mother's funeral, on 15th September, 2001. Unfortunately, Chioma could not make it due to terrorist attacks on the United States of America on 11th September 2001, consequent upon which all airports in USA were closed. The Ode was instead, ably read to the large crowd by Amara, my second son and third child, who was only 12 years old at that time! Bud Bud made me proud on that day.

# Mother's Eulogy

## "WE STAND SECURE UNDER THE SHADE OF THE NEEM TREE, GUARDED BY THE RATTLE SNAKE"

*Once upon a time, a wise young lady had to face the adverse challenges of life, without help or guide, but inspired by the wisdom of God.*

She was thrown into an arid wilderness and abandoned at the mercy of the scorching sun by day, pelted by heavy rains and insect bites at night. Nor was the land good for farming; hence hunger was a constant in her life.

The wise lady had to decide on what to do with her circumstances. The temptation was great to go for food, honey, and shelter. Some even offered her clothes and good things of life in exchange for her sun-scorched patch of land. But she reasoned that food, honey, and shelter, are comforts, which another human created out of his or her lot in life, and which therefore, she too could create, if she could use her patch of land wisely and respect the circumstances of her life.

The wise lady then decided to cultivate her sun-scorched patch of land. But then, what was she to plant on it in order to reap a handsome harvest someday?

A harvest of food, honey and shelter was very tempting, since the crops that yield them would mature within a few months and would therefore provide some relief from hunger. But the arid land in the wilderness, as it then was, did not promise a good prospect in this respect. Above all, such return would not permanently terminate the vicious cycle of hunger in which she was born.

Despite her desperate situation, the wise lady decided to pass the offer of temporary relief and instead chose to be a Farmer of Posterity. She reasoned that it would be best to make her arid inheritance cultivable in the future and habitable for her off-springs. The only seed that could, with time, provide that result was the Neem Tree which survives, grows tall, and spreads its branches in the desert, thereby create shed for other forms of life to thrive later. She therefore chose to plant the Neem Tree (Dogonyaro) on her patch of land.

The wise lady also knew that an unprotected lone plant in an arid wilderness would attract unprovoked predatory aggression of man and nature; the tendency of the mighty and the established had always been to drive out the weak and the upcoming. She therefore imbued her seed with the strength of peace and respect for other neighbours in its environment, where it was fragilely struggling to sprout. Though her seed learnt to obey, and tried to live by her moral injunctions, the wise lady observed that it wasn't infrequently that the mighty and powerful showed their contempt for the weak, poor and undefended.

Then the wise old lady said to her seed:

> *"You young sprouting plant, you plant of hope in this arid desert, while you strive for peace, you must also sink your roots deep, or the foe will try to pull you out. But in this future plantation where I have introduced you as a lone plant in an arid desert, I will also introduce the rattle snake to guard your roots. The rattle snake is known for non-aggression. In fact, it coils itself around with its head, hidden as if in a natural demonstration of its quest for peace. But an aggressor better not step on it! For if he does, he may not have a chance to tell his story"*

Today, I, your grandchild, among many others, stand before you, wise old lady of age, to proclaim the triumph of your labour and validity of your doctrines. For we stand secure, under the shade of the Neem Tree you planted, guarded by the rattle snake. It is no more a fragile lone plant in a wilderness. And no aggressor dares trespass without concern for consequence.

Adieu Mama, the blessed womb that gave birth to the Neem Tree, the precursor of future giant Oaks and Irokos.

Chioma Thompson
Your granddaughter
For & on behalf of your grandchildren, the Thompson Family"

I believe that the above narratives suffice as a brief summary of my mother's life on this Planet. It may also help to understand who she seared.

# MY LIFE:

## *Who am I*?

This is an eternal question that no Living Soul can satisfactorily answer. It is so because the question seeks and insists on information beyond our earliest consciousness. Our physical being must first disintegrate before *Who* you are can stand before you in self-proclamation. By then, it is of no use to you. It is like an autopsy report. You do not need to know what killed you, or how you died, after you are dead. But this is a question that pops up in our mind so often that we cannot totally ignore it. Hence, we are miserably abandoned with no other option than to try to remember, as far back as we could, events in our lives which we think may help us construct a prolife of our days, from as early as we can remember, to date. But then, why did those events, impact you as they did, and at same time have a totally different effect on someone else, who experienced them at the same time and place, as you?

Bearing this enigma in mind, the question becomes so complex or deeply personal that the answer is a phoenix, such that there is no objective framework for defining what qualifies as an experience or event that can impactfully determine the trajectory of someone's life. There is also a self-defence mechanism in nature that limits our ability to recollect the fine details of a traumatic event or experience. This renders any attempt to

answer the question subjective, and prone to the manipulation of emotion.

It is within the above constraints of what human nature permits that I try to answer the question.

Who I am, or what I became, can only be my attempt understood in the context of how my background was melted in the furnace of my experiences and hard hammered to transform it to the hardest steel of human willpower, as a spirit.

# My Early Days

As a child, I did not know we were poor. Everything was the same for all, except some exceptional experiences that remain stubbornly etched in my memory. I remember the nights when my mother and I dodged raindrops into our hut, through leaks in the raffia mat of our thatched mud hut. I may have been about four years then, perhaps. I clearly remember my mother cuddling me, as we moved from one spot in our hut to the other, as rain drops chased us around. Looking back now, the lightening seemed much brighter in those days, as it flashed through the darkness in our hut. This is perhaps the *relative child perception effect*. Children perceive objects to be much larger, intimidating, and threatening than they really are, due to relatively much smaller size of the child, compared to the phenomenon or object of his experience. I remember my mother telling me that we were better-off than many, much better- off than animals in the wild, who are not as fortunate as we were --- at least we had a roof over our heads, she said. I did not really understand what she was talking about. I always felt unfairly blessed to have her as my mother.

I also remember that I was a very curious and adventurous child, who enjoyed nature and the freedom of *outdoors*. I loved fishing and setting traps for rabbits and squirrels at *Ohia Ocha,* the

bushes and farmland behind Umuohuhu. I cannot remember catching any prey. But it was always very exciting. For me, the excitement was not really trapping any animal; the fun was the art or *mischief* of tricking or *outwitting* it. I also enjoyed fishing in Iyi Amangwo, Iyi Ahiama, Iyi Agalaba, Iyi Nkpurute, *Iyi Omere* (not the sacred tributary known by the same name*),* Iyi Oba, etc. The streams were beaming with all species of fish*: Oma* (sardines), *Apupa* (tilapia) Ihu *(catfish)* or *Eruru (electric fish), Okpu*, etc. The water was deep, clean and clear. In these activities, Ajuomiwe (Iwe) Agbugba of Umueke, was my hero. He always caught something, be it a snake or a rabbit. We were just about the same age, but he knew a lot more about these things than I did. He taught me how to identify which animal created or bored a hole, either on land, or in the stream. He knew their tricks, be it a rabbit-hole on land, or the hole in the stream where *Ihu*, *Okpu,* and *Eruru* live. I was amazed by both his physical strength, his extraordinary knowledge of these things, and his dexterity in catching games --- land and water residents alike. He knew what each creature was up to: *Ewi* (rabbit) would bore its hole, and trick *Ajuala* into it, only to create a barrier (*Igba*) between it and *Ajuala*. In this habitat, *Ewi* protects itself from both *Ajuala* and the human hunter. The hunter must first, fight the Ajuala and kill it, before getting to *Ewi,* who has at the same time has bored a labyrinth of holes for a safe escape once it senses that its first line of defence has been assailed and compromised by the hunter (having killed the snake). A *rabbit-hole* is the compound noun for the intricate complex ways

humans try to confuse and confound each other by mimicking the architecture of the rabbit's residence.

Fish in the streams do exactly the same. *Ihu* (Catfish) is the biggest and most sought-after fish in our streams. Unfortunately, it has no obvious physical self-defence organ in its anatomy. What *Ihu* does is to find itself in the same residence with *Okpu* and *Eruru*, serving as its gatemen. Once you put your hand in that hole, *Okpu* stings you. Often, the unskilled intruder screams and goes away. However, should he persevere and defeat *Okpu, Eruru* provides a second line of defence by delivery electric shock once any flesh makes contact with it. It is only a very skilled fisherman that knows how to remove these defence walls before catching *Ihu.* I could not understand how someone my age knew all these. Iwe was my peer hero figure in almost everything, except schoolwork. He was in every other aspect of human intelligence, a genius.

As a child, I loved playing in sand. I enjoyed building all patterns of *houses* in the sand. I got very offended when the next day they were not there. Just start another one, I would tell myself. I soon learnt that they could not be there the next day. *Nothing built on sand stays* ---- lesson I learnt so early in life.

# Education

I enrolled *myself* for primary school education at St. Brendan's Junior Elementary School at Mgbarigba, Umuajata Olokoro. I remember that day in 1953 very clearly. My mother had earlier made unsuccessful attempts to enrol me there, but I always ran away because I feared teachers' canes. I saw them flog kids my age. I could not understand why. My mother was very indulgent of me. She never bothered me for refusal to go to school. I once overheard her saying to one of her cousins (Mama Omenihu Mgbeh), that I will one day take myself to school and thereafter stay until I complete primary school. I was relieved and felt happy that she was not worried by my refusal to go to school, though I felt that the day she dreamed of, would never come. Playing on the sand without clothes was more fun, than sitting in a classroom with the ever-present menace of the teacher's cane. But that day really came. I saw other kids my age and younger, marching in the field before classes begin, as was the tradition then. I saw John Umeh and Emmanuel Ezimoha of Umuebebe Amizi. They seemed happy and not scared of the teachers. When my mother came back from the market in the evening of that day, I told her that I will go to school in the morning. I noticed that she smiled and was happy. That made me very determined to go to school and remain there.

I don't think I enjoyed sitting in a classroom for hours. It was boring. From 8:00 am to 12:00 noon seemed like eternity. But cutting it short and run home would not be fun because my friends, John Umeh and Iwe, would not have any of my ideas. I

wondered what made them seem to love the long hours of listening to a teacher make us repeat the same thing, over and over again. *Is that all we are here to do all day long?* I wondered, yawning.

My mother was often away, and I missed her so much. My grandmother would just not let me be. She loved farming, and feared that I would be poor, hungry and unable to support a family of my own, if she failed to teach me how to farm! *What is she talking about*, I often murmured to myself in disgust. Of course, she knew exactly what she was doing. Her fear was genuine. Peasant farming was the only economic activity known to her. She wanted me to learn all she could teach me about it. How does an eight-year-old think of providing for his own family? I felt that my grandmother simply enjoyed harassing me; and making sure my Saturdays and holidays (school free days), were miserable.

I completed junior primary school in 1956, and transferred to St Declan's School, Ata, Amizi Olokoro, in January 1957, for my senior primary school education. Indeed, I was very proud of myself for that because I became a *Senior Boy*! I completed senior primary school and took the Eastern *Nigeria First School Leaving Certificate Examination* in 1960. It was then an examination conducted by the *Eastern Nigeria Ministry of Education*, Enugu. Eastern Region of Nigeria then encompassed the present-day Abia, Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi, Imo, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Cross River and Bayelsa States. It was a highly completive examination in those days, and it conferred some

sort of prestige to pass it. We were a total 36 pupils from St Declan's School Olokoro who took that examination in 1960. My classmates who are still alive today include John Umeh, Patrick Uzuegbu, John Ezigbo, Donatus Eleazu, Madufor Okeiyi, etc. I was the only pupil in my class who made a *Distinction* in that examination. It confirmed my *academic celebrity* status and my superstar fame, which I acquired in primary school. That would also have been my last and highest academic accomplishment in this lifetime.

I was shocked, disappointed, embarrassed, sad, and felt betrayed, when I realised that no entity, individual or group, would volunteer to pay for me the total fee of sixty pounds a year (for tuition and boarding, etc), to enable me to proceed to secondary school, also known as Grammar School or High School. I think that was the point when I began to question *society and its values and institution,* including the moral dignity and integrity of those who arrogate to themselves the stature of leaders in the society. Certainly, it was a defining traumatic event for me and it sewed the seed of social rebel behaviour in me. Today, I continue to ponder over and interrogate these issues. It is no wonder that I have not shown up to accept any of several chieftaincy award ceremony, the modern craze (or madness) of all Igbo communities.

I had to do whatever else I could to make sure such cruel fate and consequence of coming from a financially poor family did not extinguish the bright and fiery intellect inside me, which I

was conscious of, as early as I can remember, so much so that I could hardly contain or control it.

My first attempt to get a sponsor for secondary school education was to ask my Parish priest, Rev Father Maher (of the then St Theresa's Parish, Afara Ibeku) to appeal on my behalf, to Dr. Michael Okpara, the then Premier of Eastern Nigeria as constituted. Telephones were not common then, and none was at St Theresa's Parish, Afara Ibeku. Father Maher assured me that he would travel to Enugu on my behalf, to seek audience with the Premier. Father Maher knew about me due to my performance in the afore-said primary school leaving certificate examination. My school, having broken the record of recording hundred percent success of its candidates in that examination, made the Parish very proud.

I anxiously waited to receive a message from Father Maher upon hearing that he was back from Enugu. Weeks passed, and I got no news. I became very agitated and in trepidation. In those days, you just do not go a White Reverend Father without invitation, unless it was in a very desperate situation such as administering the *Sacrament of Extreme Unction* or *Last Anointing* to a dying faithful. I finally got a message from Father Maher. I cannot remember how many minutes it took me to sprint from Umuajata to St Theresa's Parish, Afara Ibeku. I could tell that Rev. Father Maher was somehow unhappy. I was soon to find why. He gave me a slice of bread with margarine and sardine fish on it. This was the sort of food I always wanted and desired and would grab it before a hand is stretched to offer it.

But not under the immediate circumstance. My heart was racing too fast, both with excitement and fear. Father Maher gave me a cup of water. It was cold, not cool. The glass cup was *sweating,* as the water was being poured into it from a bottle. Nobody living in Olokoro knew what the hell a refrigerator was all about. It was really a very confusing moment for me. Father Maher then lit a cigarette, drew-in the smoke, and began to talk slowly as he exhaled the smoke. *He told me that he could not send for me earlier because he was trying to explore other possibilities.* My heart jumped into my mouth, and I began to cough. He knew I got the message already. He urged me to eat what was before me, but I had no appetite. Tears were just rolling down my cheeks; but I was not really crying.

Father Maher then told me that the Premier was very sympathetic but was precluded from making an exception for me because it was the policy of his political party (the NCNC) not to award a scholarship to indigenes of any constituency that voted against any NCNC candidate during the previous elections. Father Maher told me that he tried to talk to some other people, but none of them had made any commitment. He advised me not to lose hope!

I was being forced to understand how cold the real world could be, earlier than my peers. It also struck me that a request from a Reverend Father was not a canon, even for Catholics. I also began to understand the difference between what politician announce publicly, and what they actually do behind the scenes, without announcing it. I was very confused. Unfortunately, I was made a victim of something I had no hands in. I was not even

old enough to vote then. The previous election, for which I was being victimized, was the *1959 Elections*. The NCNC had imposed one Chikwendu, as a candidate for the *Odida Anyanwu County*, for the Eastern Nigeria (Regional) Parliament. Ibeku and Olokoro argued that since the Premier (Dr Michael Okpara) was from the same part of Odida Anyanwu County Area as Chikwendu, it would only be fair, for Chikwendu not to be the Member of Parliament for Odida Anyanwu County Area. The other part of the County ought to be given the slot. Dr. J.O.J Okezie, from Ibeku, spearheaded the campaign against Chikwendu. He eventually ran as an *Independent Candidate,* and defeated Chikwendu. That was my crime. The same policy was carried out all over the Region, against areas that did not vote NCNC. I am Igbo, a native of Umuahia, the same hometown as the Premier, Dr. Okpara. I was rigged out of scholarship, not because of where I came from, but because of how my local area of Umuahia, voted. This is something non-Igbo people of the former Eastern Region of Nigeria, do not understand. We were all victims of collective punishment, not because of where we come from, or our ethnicity, but because of how our different local districts voted. Dr. Michael Okpara was a very firm, courageous and incorruptible man, but fair only to his party loyalists. God help you if your people voted otherwise. I was growing up fast.

It was at this point that my disdain and distrust for politicians and politics began. Except in the few circumstances where the individual politician as a person, and his character, is well known to me, I developed suspicion and contempt for politicians and the wealth they parade. I began to fear that they

had neither moral conviction nor the principal of equity to all. Indeed, the reason for my aversion for the *Nigerian variant of partisan politics* is that most often, the politician has no nobler or loftier intention, than use his electoral base to serve his undisclosed intention. Over the years, I kept asking myself a question that remains unanswered: *how could anybody holding public office and controlling public funds that is not his or hers withhold it in a situation as mine, where and when it was morally, socially, and in every other respect implicit that a scholarship be awarded to me – having merited it -- but for political consideration?* Those who kept wondering why I declined participation in politics in 1998 when partisan politics resumed in Nigeria, herein have their questions answered. I think this unfortunate experience so early in life was at the root of my *lone dragon slayer mindset* – my distrust for public office and those who exercise power over it -- and the allegation of arrogant defier of status quo often made against me. Yes, I did not care for any authority or convention that was an obstacle, or make me yield pace to my mates, as long as I broke no law. To the contrary, I believed that any society which could indifferently allow someone with my natural intellect and academic potential to go to waste, just because my family was poor, is a sick, worthless, and a valueless society. It is interesting that sometime people suspect that there are other intentions behind the limited act of benevolence I show in my behaviour, even to the extent they think that somehow, I will one day demand a pay!

I am different because, to the contrary, my mother told me early in my life that no matter how poor a person may be, there is always *something* he can do to help his community, without expecting a reward in any form, no matter how humble and seemingly insignificant such deed may be. She warned me that whenever a human being believes that the society in which he lives lacks people with public spirit and character to tackle problems facing that society during his lifetime, then that individual is, himself, the exact problem of that community. She warned me that stealing what belongs to the public is curse; and that insatiability is not only a lethal sickness, but also the worst affliction of spiritual poverty. At a point, enough must be just that: *Enough*. It is only when you realise that you have acquired enough wealth, and seek no more, that you are liberated from mental poverty. These lessons and moral values, inculcated and etched into my being by mother, a totally illiterate woman, is at the core of my native being ---the invisible driving force and influence manifesting itself in my behaviours towards my community, and as acts of expressing my native values, a sense of social responsibility that is eternally inalienable and inseparable from my cosmic being.

When I narrated what Father Maher told me to my mother, she was devastated. She was saddened by all these brutal knocks and shocks I was receiving so early in life. One evening, she sat me down and told me that I could return to my father to seek his help; and that she would go with me, to kneel down before him, and seek forgiveness! *Forgiveness*? I almost threw up. My mother kneeling down to beg a human being for something? What on Earth deserves that price? *For what crime?* I screamed.

I think it was for me the first opportunity for the two of us to open up our emotion to each other. My mother and I were great friends. We understood each other very well. We could read each other like a book, even if the book had no prints. She knew how sad I was, though we did not discuss it. But this moment was different. It was a *covenant moment*. We had both been silently consumed by worries for weeks, wondering if a Good Samaritan would somehow appear, from anywhere. Our fears heightened as the beginning of the new school term (then mid-January), was running towards us. Our last hope was a scholarship from the Government of Eastern Nigeria, which everyone believed ought to be automatically awarded to me, even if just one slot for Olokoro, given my academic performances. But things were different then. The message from Father Maher snuffed out that ray of hope or illusion, call it what you think is most apt. I saw my mother crying. I could not pretend to be strong anymore. Shamefully, I could not console her. I was also crying. But it was my mother who first stopped crying. Suddenly, she stood up, went into the kitchen, and was there for a few minutes. Then she called me, and asked me to *help* her to pound *Ukpo*, a thickener for *Ofe Uha*, my favourite soup. I do not think that I felt fulfilled and happy to do any chore in my life, as pounding *Ukpo*, as I did that evening, helping *my mother*. I resolved, there and then, to never ever talk of secondary school again before her. Pounding *Ukpo,* to *help her* that evening, opened my heart to realise that I could still make her proud by doing something, even without going to formal secondary school. I think it was there and then that other options started flying across my mind. It was also there and then that a force took over my life, and perhaps changed its

trajectory, for the better or for the worse, I still do not know. It depends on how one looks at it. I lost my innocent view of life, and my attitude towards society. As a child, I was very curious, anxious to learn for the love of learning. I was fascinated by books, and I admired and respected my elders I saw reading big books. I hoped to someday be one of them, the respected learned men who had even gone as far as the Whiteman's land and studied in the same classroom with them. That was all I cared for and dreamed of. Then this shock! All my childhood dreams were threatened. By What? *Money.* Without money, you cannot do much, especially go to school and read those books that I admired and desired to read, even when I had no idea whatsoever of what is written in them. My innocent love and hunger for pure knowledge for its beauty and sweetness has just been taken away from me, permanently. I began to see knowledge as a commodity. The more of it you acquire the higher your chance of been wealthy. Even to date, there is still that gaping hole in my Soul, wondering over what may have been, that was not allowed to be, wondering over the trajectory my life would have taken, had it not been acted upon that early by a mighty force I did not know existed till then -- a force beyond my mother's strength and might, *Poverty.* I was growing up too fast. *Oyibo, you must read those books and use what you learned from them to make money, lots of money,* I told myself.

I made an application to Monsignor Unegbu, then Rector of *Immaculate Conception Seminary* Ahiaeke Ibeku, through Father Ukaegbu, a native of my Parish, who was assistant to the Rector. I went to my former Headmaster, Mr. Ambrose Uko, from Oboro, for a testimonial, as was required in those days.

When my former Headmaster heard what the testimonial was for, he looked at me almost sternly, as if in derision. Then he cast his face to the floor and asked me to come the next day to collect it. He gave a very friendly pat on my shoulders, something Headmasters rarely did in those days, as if he was telling me to never give up. I nodded. Years later, I understood what he meant. I had told him that I had applied to the Immaculate Conception Seminary Ahiaeke Ibeku, to be considered for a position as one of the domestic servants in Seminary. I did not disclose my intentions because he did not give me a chance to do so, When I came the next day, his mood was much lighter. He behaved as if he was telling me: *cheer up, never give up*, as he quietly handed me an envelope addressed to the Rector, Immaculate Conception Seminary Ahiaeke Ibeku. I thanked him. But before I walked away, he said: *Oh, Barth, you can seal the envelope for me*. Then he smiled at me and turned his back. He knew I was not going to just seal it. I read what he wrote. He told the Rector that he was sad, but at the same time very proud that I was his pupil, and to write a testimonial of me. He said he was sure I will have *a future that I deserved*. My real intention was to just get out of the village, and not be there, to see my friends leave for their different boarding schools. I hoped that I could work at the seminary as a domestic servant, in exchange for free tuition and boarding. The Monsignor read the testimonial of my former Headmaster and looked sad. He passed it to Father Ukegbu, who already knew my story. The Monsignor then asked if I wanted the job. I was very hesitant to say: *yes father*. He said I could start the next day, on a salary of *one pound and ten shilling a month*. That was about ten percent of the minimum wage in

Nigeria as recommended by the *Morgan Commission* at the time. But that was not my problem. I thought I should just take up the job first, and then, through the mediation of Father Ukegbu who knew my case, convince the Monsignor to consider my Proposal. It backfired. It was not long before reports reached the Monsignor that I was getting myself too involved with seminarians, instead of doing my job. It was at that point that I told the Monsignor what my real intention was. I was surprised that he was not outraged by my not being frank and forthright with him right from the jump. He simply said that he understood my situation; but that the Seminary was only for those who intended to join the *Holy Orders*. Then he looked right into my eyes and said nothing else. He thereby spared me the embarrassment of trying to deceive the *Mother Church.* Then he handed me an envelope in which was exactly *three pounds*. That would have been my earnings in two months. I was there for less than a month. He said I could spend the night at Seminary and leave the following morning. I thanked him and left for the servants' quarters.

The news of my impending departure spread like wildfire among the seminarians. I had bonded with a number of them during my short say. A few notes were secretly passed to me that night, wishing me well. One of the seminarians, Cajetan, sent a note, asking that I try and come for *Morning Mass* the next day before I leave, so that they could pray for me during the moment of *Prayers for Private Intentions,* as was the custom and practice in those days. I did. Then I left for Olokoro, through Agbama. I later understood that Cajetan died during the Biafran War.

But before I go into any other details of how my personality and spirituality was constructed from the above background facts, I must state, for emphasis, that I could not be given the luxury of formal education beyond primary or elementary school. My mother just could not afford it, try as hard as she did. I had to educate myself to understand Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology (known then as General Science), Geography, Literature and English Language, which I passed with Credits, in what was then known as *General Certificate of Education Examination*, (Ordinary Level), set by the University of London, for candidates from all over the British Empire (later called *'Commonwealth'*). I struggled and studied day and night, using kerosene lantern, in our thatched mud house, to study at night. I borrowed books from my friends, when they came home for holidays from their various boarding schools. At that age, my friends were very kind and sympathetic towards me. They were sad to see that *I could not be one of them.* That kinsman sympathy towards me expressed by my age-mates and peers during my moments of extreme sadness still affects how I behave towards them till this day. On my part, I could have done anything to be in their shoes then, but fate has its mind. It cared less about whatever else I would have preferred. In retrospect, *I think the Universe was trying to prepare me for the tasks ahead of me.* It is no accident that the Spiritual: "By and By When the Morning Comes", is one of my most favourites in that genre of music.

# AND THE BATTLE BEGAN

It was *High Noon*. M*en* and Society have chosen sides. *And I must fight alone and defeat them all.* But I was only eighteen years old. This fire was to burn in me for tens of decades. It became more ferocious in later years, when I had the opportunity to read books written by an American author, Waldo Emerson.

Perhaps you may get a better insight of my lot, if you can imagine a situation where, as one develops into puberty, I could not afford an underwear. I used rubber band to restrain my penis, so that its unnecessary sudden erection would not be noticed, as it had absolutely no provocation to so behave. But *Mother Nature* is what It is. However, by tying it down with a rubber band, I saved myself some embarrassment, from being laughed at by other boys.

My Early Years was a period during which I endured a seemingly endless ordeal of a lonely struggle to achieve *something* outstanding, even when I had no clear definition or picture of exactly what that mythical *something* was, except an almost metaphysical or arrogant conviction that *I was not an average person.* I think I had this conviction as early as the first moments of my self-consciousness. Hence, I was obsessed with a need to prove it, despite the unfavourable circumstances of my birth. In my thirties and forties, I was so gripped by a neurotic fear of failing to achieve this mythical *something,* that I felt

justified doing just about anything to achieve it, *provided I did not break any law,* even to the extent that I considered death, a better alternative to failing to achieve it. In retrospect, it would have been *an unjust god* who would not let me be what, for decades, I struggled to be. I take full responsibility for my seemingly reckless behaviours, during that dreadful season of my desperate existence.

I was 22 years old when the *Biafra War for Independence* broke out. During that War (1967 – 1970), I became a battlefield commander of men who in some cases were five years older than I was. Despite the socio-economic background and physical advantages some of them had over me, *I was their superior officer!* I felt I had finally bridged the gap. My academic exploit of passing University of London General Certificate of Education Examinations on my own, was asserting its value, and making a clear difference in my life. I became very audacious, as I gained more confidence in my capacity to act independently, relying solely on the power of my *Mind* for aboriginal initiatives, without seeking anybody's approval, in the life and death situations, which only kinetic battlefields present. I became confident of *My Mind*, which had earlier manifested its exceptionality by my passing Eastern Region of Nigeria Standard Six Certificate Examination with Distinction; and *my brilliance* that had enabled me to pass University of London General Certificate ("O" Level) examinations without tuition, could be relied upon to perform any intellectual task, excellently and superbly. But that was short lived. We lost Biafra. Some people felt they could put me back to what they considered was my place in society. Some people said to my face, that they

would rather bear the loss of Biafra, than live in a nation where people *from nowhere* (like me) would be their superiors. Again, I was told to my face that *after a flood disaster, water must return to its level.* That was sobering. And it gave me food for thought for a while. But it was too late for them. *I had already proven to myself that I was beyond them*. Trying to bring me down, to where I was before the War, was like lying on a waterbed mattrass and trying to force it down to a level you prefer. It will pop up on the other sides that are not under your weight. You cannot press it down to any other level, than the level it has acquired by virtue of its content, a content so self-evident.

In a war's fierce crucible, *souls are forever* forged and native aboriginal character exposed. The universe itself, born of cosmic rage, is a witness to this bloody stage of violent explosions. Without the turbulent forces that mould and shape the beauty of the earth, it would be but a barren drape. The sun itself, a fire, that sustains life's might, was born in the dark of night. The *Real Thing* that makes a Man is mercilessly exposed and betrayed in a kinetic battlefield as hot cannon balls fly overhead, and ears are deafened by the din of explosions all around, the ground crimson red with the hot blood of your friends and peers, who, just seconds before, just shared a stick of *AC*, a brand of cigarettes supplied by Christian Charities like Caritas and World Council of Churches. As the fierce foe surges in rage, bayonets drawn to finish off your dying comrades, *Something, the Real Thing at your core of your cosmic being, must, at that Moment, itself define:* either you lie still, pretend you are dead so that you are spared the thrust of bayonets into your chest, while the enemy chivalrously disembowel your comrades, or you do the

*Ultimate,* as indeed only few *Men* can --- damn the consequence and open fire to slow down the wave of surging foe, who are armed to the teeth for the task; while you count the bullet that fly out from the nozzle of your rifle, wondering if you have enough to fire until the foe retreats. Yes, I saw cowards abandon their fallen and about-to fall comrades and fled. Yes, indeed they were the chaps who yesterday wore the most fashionable clothes, and bounced on their heels, as if even the entire Earth was theirs. Here, in the kinetic battlefield, *where* the horrors of savagery in Nature of Man is free to reign; *Here* in the midst utmost of violence, demanding the readiness to pay the supreme price to save the life of your comrades if necessary; *Here,* is the Maternity Ward where *Real Men* are born, and nothing else thereafter can disprove their valour. Battlefields' cruel honesty is that it is an unabashed display of raw savagery, horror, fury and chivalry in a controlled order. The sad aftermath is indelible in society. It also exposes the elements of which every individual is made. So let us not be fooled by the tranquillity we see around us. For beneath the surface, a cauldron of violence is always brewing. And though it is hard, brutal, and bloody to behold, it is in the heart of the consequent battlefield that the truly brave are blessed to prove themselves. And those who did themselves so prove, invariably, can no more stand the *tyranny of privileged coward*s.

> *LARS Porsena of Clusium who By the Nine Gods swore That the great house of Tarquin Should suffer wrong no more. And bade his messengers ride forth, East and west and south and north, to summon his array. East and west and south and north the messengers ride fast, And tower*

*and town and cottage Have heard the trumpet's blast. Shame on the false Etruscan Who lingers in his home, When Porsena of Clusium Is on the march for Rome.*

The above is quoted from *Horatio,* by Thomas Babington Macauley. It is a classical sabre-rattling, to evoke and arouse racial or ethnic sentiment in war of revenge against a people, as retribution for an alleged wrongdoing. That was exactly the Battle Cry against the Igbo race, from July 1966 to January 1970.

As Google's Wikipedia narrates:

Lars Porsena was an Etruscan king (about 508 BCE). After the revolution in 509 BCE that overthrew Lucius Tarquinius Superbus, the last king of Rome, Lars Porsena declared war on Rome, not because of any wrong Rome did to him or Etruscan race or society, but solely and singularly because the deposed monarch, Lucius Tarquinius Superbus was like him, Lars Porsena, of Etruscan origin, and he demanded the blood of Romans for it.

Sounds familiar?!

On 29th day of July 1966 CE, military Officers from the Northern Region of Nigeria, under the political leadership of a man called Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon, and the military command of Majors Murtala Mohammed, and Theophilus Danjuma, etc set out to slaughter anyone of Igbo descent in the Nigerian Armed Forces, not for anything the individual victim

did, but solely because someone with an Igbo name, Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu, announced over the radio, a military coup in which the victims include in the main, military officers and political leaders from the Northern Region of Nigeria, the same region as the avengers: Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon, and Majors Murtala Mohammed and Theophilus Danjuma. Yakubu Gowon, who got the support of the United Kingdom to be the political leader of the Junta, lost control of the deadly armed mob of all ranks in the Nigeria Army, and they unleashed mayhem, killing anyone Igbo at sight, and burnt and looted their properties. The horror was unprecedent both in scope and magnitude, and in its sheer savagery and goriness. The bloodbath went totally out of control, with no restraint, after the Igbo race declared the Eastern Region of Nigeria as an independent sovereign State in order to protect themselves from the lunacy that was in rampage on Nigeria.

In those terrible and frightful days, when the dreaded combined might of all the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, in conspiracy with the Western Europe, like Lars Porsena's steel-clad might threaten Rome, the Igbo race was threatened by extinction; and fear was everywhere in Igboland, enfolding it like a cold blanket on a chilly night; and all trebled. The enemy's ranks, a seemingly endless sea, did indeed surge and roar, in fury's ecstasy.

> “Just then a scout came flying,
> All wild with haste and fear:
> ‘To arms! to arms! Sir Consul:

Lars Porsena is here.’
On the lows hills to westward
The Consul fixed his eye,
And saw the swarthy storm of dust
Rise fast along the sky.
And nearer fast and nearer
Doth the red whirlwind come;
And louder still and still more loud,
From underneath that rolling cloud,
Is heard the trumpet’s war-note proud,
The trampling, and the hum.
And plainly and more plainly
Now through the gloom appears,
Far to left and far to right,
In broken gleams of dark-blue light,
The long array of helmets bright,
The long array of spears.…
--- But the Consul’s brow was sad,
And the Consul’s speech was low,
And darkly looked he at the wall,
And darkly at the foe.
‘Their van will be upon us
Before the bridge goes down;
And if they once may win the bridge,
What hope to save the town?’
Then out spake brave Horatius, The Captain of the gate:
‘To every man upon this earth
Death cometh soon or late.
And how can man die better

Than facing fearful odds,
For the ashes of his fathers,
And the temples of his Gods,
‘And for the tender mother
Who dandled him to rest,
And for the wife who nurses
His baby at her breast,
And for the holy maidens
Who feed the eternal flame,
To save them from false Sextus
That wrought the deed of shame?”

Horatius, stood unshaken and serene in his iron resolve to hold his ground, like an invisible rock, even as his comrades fell. Though in the end, unlike in Babington Macaulay’s Horatio, in *Lays of the Ancient Rome* (1842 CE) quoted above, the cause for which the *Igbo Horatio* fought for in that war was lost; but not on moral argument, but to superior armament of the opposing side ---- as is indeed the doomed faith of mankind. But the *Igbo Horatio* has in the battle fields of that war, found *Himself* and defined his character: a man steadfast and true, who stood resolute to the bitterest end, still shining like beacons in the dark of night. A man, though weary, but unbroken, who still stood and proud in spirit, even as the eclipse of defeat threatened encirclement of all things around him and his comrades in arm and his contemporaries.

His eyes had also been opened in the battle fields to see a shocking revelation:

Most of those who used to arrogantly prowl the land and held themselves like dragon slayers among the children of a lesser god, are indeed no more than parasitic fetus in the womb of their parents. Without the benevolent connection of the umbilical cords through which they suck the nutrients in the oxygen-rich blood of their parents, they would have long died as still- births.

I have argued in a different book in favour of a scientific investigation of the *Aboriginal Igbo Cosmology* which boldly states that *Life* originated from *Ife*, light, a quantum of the electromagnetic spectrum. It simply means that the electromagnetic spectrum is the building block of matter; and that from it, all the subsequent fundamental forces of nature, including gravity, and the strong and weak nuclear forces, emerged. Within the scheme, I scientifically demonstrated that within the fields of biophysics and quantum biology, there is, for each human being's respiratory system, "Cosmic Breath Encoding" (CBE) Scheme for encoding human breath in the electromagnetic spectrum, which also serves as a *Carrier* for transmitting breath information between an individual and the Cosmos, such that each human can be likened to an electromagnetic pulse or signal connected to the Universe through a *Bluetooth frequency,* wherever the individual may be, even as an embryo in the mother's womb through the umbilical cord, which connects the mother's oxygen intake to the fetus. The implication of this is that right at conception, the Universe has assigned a particular energy frequency for the life of every human being. This force field frequency is what Igbo people call *Akara Aka*, a cosmic identity, in which, for the individual, is

encoded *everything* about that *Life,* which will be executed through his *Chi,* in each lifetime. The implication of all the above is that beyond the corporal identity and genetic inheritance of each individual, there is *Something* each individual is either given, or denied, by the Divine. *Tuition and culturing are helpless, when that "Something" is just not there*.

I saw a lot of such unfortunate individuals and their clansmen in the battlefields of Biafra, where it became clear to me that they had nothing of their own to show. They lacked *Something*, that rendered them totally helpless, in situations that their parents could not help them.

As a young man in my teenage to early 20s, I was skinny and looked frail, especially given my complexion. Some of these guys, by virtue of their *genetic inheritance (their physical stature)*, were menacingly intimidating, and they could not resist the temptation of behaving like bullies around me. Disarmed of everything they had *by virtue of who their parents were* (material and genetic), they were just plain empty cowards, often bereft of natural initiatives. I discovered that they were in no way my match, in contest and context of anything their parents did not give them. In my case, despite whatever my handicaps were, I had always known that I came into this world to do *Something*, but exactly what, I had no clue, except being possessed by a restlessness of the spirit that tormented me, even when I seemed otherwise comfortable (or almost). This is my Spirit, tried and tested in the free-for-all killing fields of the epic war of Biafra Independence, a Spirit determined to continue its journey to

wherever destination fate so imposes, in defiance of all barriers, be they man-made, or even natural.

The fate of those aggrieved by my *natural* self-assertion mindset was already sealed by what I had affirmed about myself in the kinetic battlefields of Biafra: confidence in my thoughts, faith in my innate intelligence, courage in the face of danger, and an almost fanatical belief and conviction that I was superior to my detractors, and that they must therefore queue behind me, in any fair perching order, anywhere on this Planet. I was fuelled by my conviction that despite my human shortcomings, the mercy of God was with me; and it would see me through. I had faith that God *Understands* the unique circumstances underlying each human behaviour; that pre-assigned to each individual before birth is an unknown and unknowable quantum field energy frequency, a *Chi,* that determines and controls each individual. I also believed that God has no uniform or common pre-calibrated standard penal or reward code for responding to every human behaviour. I began to suspect that what some people may have considered as my '*out of the norm behaviours* or conducts could be no more than their resentment over my confidence in myself, and my audacity in imposing self-assertion whenever necessary.

When the War ended in January 1970, instead of looking for whatever job I could find, I shocked everyone by deciding to go back to the classroom for HSC, Higher School Certificate or GCE Advanced Level education at Federal Government College Sokoto. Clearly, I had no intention to queue behind anybody due to my failure to have University education which was likely to

be my fate; hence, it was *sine qua non* I had to go back to the classroom and pass examinations HSC, Higher School Certificate or GCE Advanced Level Examinations. I was determined that nothing on Earth ought to reduce me to an underling in any society. It would blame myself if in the near future my peers would flash academic prowess certificate when I have none. Many people could not read my mind when in 1970 I rejected the option of continuing in Nigerian Army as a Military Officer but instead went back to a classroom after rising to the height of Substantive Captain. It seemed an act of self-humiliation to many, especially given the terribly shaken ego of many Igbos after defeat, and priority many placed on getting their hands at the Nigerian pound to reduce the psychological challenge of every Igbo household being humiliated by the Federal Military Government policy of giving everyone a sum of twenty pounds and no more, no matter how much the person had before the War.

I had come to believe that there is that *Something* I am destined be, and therefore must and shall be *that*, beyond and above those who considered themselves *the elite,* by virtue of who their parents were. *Nothing else was an option.* This was my state of mind when, instead of taking a job of teaching in a secondary school after HSC, I left Nigeria by the end of 1971.

## **MY STRUGGLES**.

*A picture tells a story better than a thousand words,* they say in Hollywood, California. I am going to exploit that adage here to tell My Story, My Odyssey: where I started from, to lay the foundation for where I am "*Today*", and *Today*, in its timeless sense.

When it became clear to me that I had exhausted all the locally available sources for funding post primary school education, my mother and I agreed that I should go to Lagos and wait there for her first son, Joshua Egwuekwe (Dede- Joshua) to return from the *Sea* in the hope that he would pay for my post primary education. Dede Joshua worked as a steward for ocean liners; hence he was called a Seaman. I was sceptical. I had not met him; and we knew next to nothing about each other. It was a very anxious moment for me when I was told he was back in Lagos that I could see him. Many people were surprised when he said he could not afford to pay for my first-year fees a total of sixty pounds (not even the fee of twenty pounds for the first term). He offered to pay eighteen shillings a month for me to learn "Typing and Shorthand". I accepted, though I knew I had absolutely no intention to do any such thing. I only wanted to remain in Lagos instead of returning back to the village where I knew nothing else awaited me than shame and humiliation. It was not long before his wife kicked me out and my mother had to move to Lagos immediately, she knew what was happening between Dede Joshua's wife and I.

We had some close relatives in Lagos at that time. These included Mr. Cyril Nnanta Umeh (Papa Nnanta) and Dick Nwakauba Avaja (De-Dick), both of Umueke --- my mother's kinsmen. I am eternally grateful for the kindness these wonderful men showed my mother and I in our moments of distress. However, I made it clear that I rather get a menial job to earn a living while I study on my own for University of London General Certificate of Education *Ordinary Level* Examinations. My mother immediately declared that Da-Mathilda Avaja, Da Chianuka Rachael Egedigwe, and Da-Ugbodo, Onyeoziri had offered to share their ground space at Lawanson Bus stop make-shift market. Except Da-Mathilda, all the above were born at Umueke, the place as my mother. They are all deceased now, but they are of eternal memory and my gratitude.

My mother was squatting under the rain and the six days a week to sell vegetables in Lawanson market. She would go to Iddo to buy the vegetables twice a week and retailed it in Lawanson. I cannot really write much on what happened to my mother and I during this period. It still hurts so much, to the extent that I tried to blackout what we went through. I rather go to the comic relief of the period.

At a point, De Dick Avaja found me a job as a cleaner in Bristol Hotel, Martin Street, Lagos at a salary of ten pounds a month. It was one of the happiest moments of my life. I worked from 4.pm to 11.45 pm. I had time to study in between. Above all, I felt I could relieve my mother of some of our upkeep costs. I also got

some new clothes, something I really needed. As soon as I had one or two pairs of pants, shirts and a pair of shoes, I did the something that left no one doubt that I was up to no good: I was seen dancing merrily on Nigeria Television Service Channel 10 Lagos! Everyone scornfully snapped their fingers in disgust. *Oh, is this what Oyibo is up to? Hmm. No wonder then why no one wanted to waste his money on that boy. So, he was waiting all this time to earn some money to show us who he really is.* Dr. Kenneth Ngozi Asagwara of Okwu Olokoro and Donatus Sunday Eleazu of Umudu Umuajata are the only persons I can remember who were in Lagos then, when uproar over my outrageous action was all over the place in Lagos.

I think the reader would like to hear my side of the story that so outraged everyone. In those days, there was a television programme for young people called *Saturday Square*.

I don't know what similar programmes were called in Europe in the 1960s. However, I know of a similar programme in the United States called *Soul Train.* In Lagos, *Saturday Square* served exactly the same entertainment purpose as *Ukonu's Cub* in Eastern Nigeria Television Service, no worse or sinister. I think what dismayed people was that I was pushing myself into social circles they felt I had no business going near. The hosts and producers of *Saturday Square* were prominent television personalities of the day like Art Alade, Turi Akelere, and Rosemary Anieze. It was the dream of every young person in Lagos to appear on the programme but only very few were carefully selected. Among those who participated in the

programme with me were Tony Benson, Laoye Pratt, Yinka Balogun, among others. I was relieved to learn that De-Dick and Papa-Nnanta only laughed when they saw me dancing. I think my mother was confused about the whole palaver. She never saw me dancing on television; and I don't that she even knew what it was, let alone sit down to watch a programme on it. However, people's anxiety was promptly relieved when they heard that I had been gotten rid of by Bristol Hotel which fired me within less than 90 days of employment. I came to work one evening and was assigned to *Koriko Bar* of Bristol Hotel. At about 9.00pm a white gentleman asked to escort a lady to his room. He gave me his room number. I had absolutely no idea it was against the hotel rules to oblige such request by a patron. I only said: Yes, Sir. The next day, I was fired! There went up in flames my new life and my dreams of earning some money every month to help myself and my mother. I was so sad, confused and angry over the impact of what happened to me that I never gave a second of thought to what people were saying.

I simply ignored them and used my time to focus fully on preparing myself for GCE examinations. But as usual, events that I had absolutely nothing to do with, directed the trajectory of my life. 1966 Crisis started and my mother and I ran from Lagos back to Olokoro, where we became almost homeless. --- our hut having fallen due to lack of maintenance during the years my mother and I were in Lagos.

The picture you see at the first page of this book, is the house I built in 1967, with the first money I was paid as a soldier in the

then “Eastern Command of Nigerian Army”, under Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu who was the Military Governor of the then Eastern Nigeria. My children: Dike and Chioma, saw that house, before it was demolished to create space for others to build on. Before then, my mother and I had no house. We were squatting with one of her brother’s estranged wives, Bessie Eluwa *(my Da-Bessie*), in her own thatched mud hut. It was from that thatched house which I built in 1967, that I left Nigeria in December 1971.

The evening before I left Olokoro for Enugu, to report at the Military Academy in 1967, my friends, Kanu Samuel Okebugwu (from Umuobu Umuajata), and George Uzu (from Umudu Umuajata), left their much more comfortable accommodation to spend *that night* with me. As they bade me farewell on the morning of my departure, a passage in William Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* ran across my mind: *“If we do meet again, why, we shall smile; if not, why then this parting was well made*”, (Act 5, Scene 1)

Unfortunately, George Uzu died in 1967, while I was still in the military academy. *We never met again*. I was shocked to my marrows. Kanu and I remained friends until he died in 1991 or there about. They were great Spirits, and I will forever remember them.

How I was able to get myself out of Nigeria, along with my cosmic friend and spiritual kindred, Onyebuchi Victor Onwuneme, of Umuebebe Amizi Olokoro (the only human

being I ever truly bonded with, and fully trusted), remains a well-guarded secret, as both of us agreed should be so. Onyebuchi died on 13th October 1979, from blunt force trauma, following a vehicular accident in a street in Los Angeles. Onyebuchi died without relieving me of our promise to each order, to keep *our exploits* a secret between the two of us. Hence, I remain ever reluctant, often ambivalent, and even evasive, in the details of our travail and ordeal. And it shall forever remain so. But for your benefit, I can only give hints.

We did not depart from Nigeria through a sea or airport. Some part of our journey involved crossing international borders on foot. Sometimes we were sent back to the last country we left, until we eventually left Africa, through the help of the Catholic Church. When the news (that we had indeed left Africa) reached Olokoro, it was cynically derided by some people. Indeed, my mother burst into tears, as she heard a cacophony of sceptical voices, predicting that we would be apprehended and jailed for the "crime" of illegal entry into a foreign country; and thereafter repatriated back to Nigeria in humiliation. It baffled me to realise that some people wished me evil, absolutely for no other reason, than that I was trying to raise myself above a level they believed I was born and destined to remain. *Till some of them died, they could not really show what crimes or sins I committed, either against them or their society, or their god.* I could not understand the reason for the passive malice and resentment some people evinced towards me. What troubled me for some time, was not the malice itself, but the baselessness of it. I did not stop or in any way precluded anyone, who had the nerve and

intellect, from entering the fray. It was an open fair game. (De-Aliche) James Onwuka from Ụmụrohiri, the grandfather-in-law of Okechukwu Eluwa, and De-Dick Avaja of Ụmụarikita, were the only prominent persons who made a heart-lightening comment to relieve my mother's anxiety. De-Aliche James Onwuka told my mother to ignore the doomsday prophets. He said that his only concern was that *Oyibo may have returned to his people*; that *Oyibo, from childhood, had always comported himself in a manner that described why he was named Oyibo.* That was good enough to cheer my mother up. To her, provided I was alive and happy anywhere, nothing else mattered, even if it meant never seeing me again.

Except to the brain-dead, by the *1980s and 1990s,* it was clear to almost everyone, that I was unstoppably headed for *Somewhere*. I recall that some of these people never failed to seize any opportunity, no matter how strained, to remind me of the occasions when, as a child, they shared their meals with me, when my mother was away, and I had *nothing* to eat. Whatever their intentions, they later realised that I love to be reminded of *those times* because they were for me, indeed, the best of times. We were all in primary school then. As long as everyone paid their school fees (a maximum of one pound and twelve shilling a year) and had school uniform, no one felt he was more or less than the other. We all went to school bare-footed. Hence, I deeply enjoyed and laughed over such stories, innocently thinking we were sharing precious memories of our childhood, the *care-free good-old days*. But it started becoming their chorus and refrain, whenever we were together. It began to seem and

feel as if we have no other childhood memories to share, except their *golden days*, when they had a *little-bit-more-to eat*, than I had. In those day, I would go hungry, not because I had nothing to eat, but rather due to lack of appetite for *Akpụ*, especially when the accompanying *Ofe* was miserably tasteless. My grandmother would scream at me for refusing to eat. I often heard my grandmother advising my mother to stop indulging me. She advised my mother to stop making sure another or different *Ofe* is prepared for me whenever I refused to eat what was available. My grandmother was worried that my mother was over-pampering me. In her opinion and experience, kids who always got whatever they asked for, did not acquire or learned the skill of making do with whatever is available. She was absolutely right. But I was not really demanding much, or something totally different, I thought then. If it must be *Akpụ*, why don't you make the *Ofe* taste a little bit better, by adding a little bit more crayfish, or even one or two pieces of dried tilapia, or a bit less water? It was not necessary to fill the pot with water and call it *Ofe*. My grandmother would turn around and tell me to remember that my portion to eat was there, should I decide that I am hungry!

I thought that my grandmother did not care how any *Ofe* tasted, as long as there was enough heap of *Akpụ* in the *Ikwo* or *Oba.* But I was only a child then. Young children do not have a complex mind, as experiences impose on the adults. I did not realise that I was not the only grandchild to be fed, and that I was even more fortunate because my mother was alive. Obi and Chubby had lost theirs', and we were sharing the same

grandmother. The *Ofe* had to be enough for everyone, regardless of how small the crayfish was. Even then, it must be that she enjoys keeping me miserable, just because my mother has gone to the market. Indeed, why not *Ofe Ụgụ na Okro*, which does not permit arbitrary addition of water, otherwise it loses what makes Ofe *Ụgụ na Okro*? She knows I love this *Ofe,* which tastes great, especially with a bit of *Nchawụ,* even if you don't have crayfish. And why not *Ji*, which she knows I enjoy eating, instead of *Akpụ*? She only had to just boil it, and my meal is made. Why does she not just do that, and forget the whole *Ofe* issues? *What are you going to do with the yam in the barn?* I often asked my mother, as soon she comes back from wherever she had gone to. But my mother would only laugh, instead of doing *something* to my grandmother, as I had told her my mother would, when she comes back from the market. I guess I had to threaten her somehow. I was confused to see that my mother would instead be laughing with my grandmother over these issues. *Does she not understand how serious they are*? I wondered. I did not understand then that exactly the same love that binds me to my mother, also binds her to my grandmother. However, whenever my mother was around, she would make sure that *Uha* would be the next *Ofe.* Little did I realise then that in Igbo culture, *Ji* is a male crop. Customarily, women do not own yams. Besides, unlike cassava, yam tuber must be re-planted during the next planting season, in order to produce more yams in the next harvest season.

I often go into a delightful reverie when I reminisce of these *big issues* of that time. It helps me to see how my mind worked, as

an innocent child. Hence, I could not know what my friends were up to, when in the 1980s and early 1990s, they often reminded me of yesterday. They are stories of *where we all where*, at a point in time and space. Their reminding me of those innocent beautiful days gave me a pause, a moment to catch myself and appreciate my *Present*. Looking down the abyss, the ominous bottomless dark chasm below, from where I started, as I see myself at such dizzying height as my present; looking down the dark slippery floor of the muddy pit that was my launching pad; looking down at it now, from the summit of Himalayas, and my eyes unobstructed to see the curvature of the spheres, looking down and letting it all sink in, I am sure that I must have been propelled by a rocket, the only thing that can lift anyone so high, apparently without gradient, from such a deep pit. I am overawed, and in fact sometimes terrified. No such object can so exist in God's Universe, at such height --- in defiance of the powerful gravity of its background circumstances --- unless it is propelled to lift off, by an invisible force, and supported to remain there. Yes, I am in awe, humbled by the *miracles* my eyes behold.

Ironically, in retrospect, I now realise that *where I started from*, is the greatest weapon and advantage I had in dealing with whatever life threw at me. I understood the features of that miserable and horrendous terrain so well, that I revere and honour it; and at the same time, I do all I can to delete it from the face of the Planet. I revere and honour it because, in it, character and strength are born. I do all I can to delete it from the face of the Planet, because it is unfairly too harsh for many,

so harsh that many die of it, in it, due to the injustice done them by behaviours of their fellow Man.

Yes, the *2 Corinthians 1:3-4*, of the Christian Bible, where God is described as the *Father of all Comfort*, "*who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in trouble, with the same comfort we ourselves received from God*", is my Covenant with the Universe, a cosmic oath I swore, binding all my inheritors, even long after I am gone, provided that the fruits they enjoy is from the seeds of my life struggles.

# MY QUEST FOR THE GOLDEN FLEECE

Despite the untenable material circumstances in which I found myself, I knew I was otherwise headed for reasonable *success* in Life, beyond what would be average for anyone with my background. Whatever I did not have materially, was more than made-up-for, by mindset. When I left Nigeria and eventually entered the United States of America, my literary world expanded. Given my innate capacity and disposition for voracious reading, I came across the writings of many famous and *controversial* men and women of their time. Their mode of thoughts seemed absolutely in sync with mine. That discovery, epiphany, self-awareness, or whatever you call it, added fuel to what was already a raging inferno of defiant self-confidence within me. That was the tipping point. I could disdainfully care less of what anybody thought of me; and I began to uncompromisingly rely solely on my own inner thoughts, and nothing else. I wore all sorts of uncharitable name-calling like a war hero's badge of honour: *arrogant upstart, an out-of-place entity, etc. T*hese never bothered me, especially literarily *'growing up'* in a city like Los Angeles (of the 1970s), where baseless lofty dreams, self- righteousness and audacity, were coveted virtues. My dismissive attitude and the strange *arrogance* towards my critics were reinforced by the writings of one particular American: Ralph Waldo Emerson: the author of "*The Spiritual Emerson" and "Self-Reliance".*

I was astonished that despite the socio-economic advantages he must have had over me, there was a striking similarity between his personality and mine. Ralph Waldo Emerson was the son of a Unitarian Minister in America, which exposed him to better childhood comforts and influences than I had. From the time of my birth to the day I left Olokoro in December 1971, a stretch of twenty-six years, majority of the houses where still mud houses with thatched roofs. There was no house with running water in the entire Olokoro Community, neither with electricity. All the houses were lit with kerosene lantern at night, and even within sixty miles radius, there was no house with water supply, everyone went to the stream to fetch water. It seemed to me that despite the socio-cultural economic gulf of vast oceans and mountain peaks that separated Emerson and myself in time and space, we had the same mode of thought, beliefs, social posture, and attitude. He was as ruthlessly self-assertive, and gracelessly dismissive of his critics, as I was. What struck me most was that despite the powerful religious influences around him as a child (being the son of a clergyman, which ought to have moulded his thoughts), we shared a common concept of God, faith, fate and destiny. I also sensed a hint of *righteous arrogance* and defiance in him even at the time he lived --- over a hundred years before me. For me, that was most notable. I discovered that despite over a hundred years before me, this Harvard Professor had pondered and struggled the same issues I was struggling to come to terms or deal with, while I was living in a hut in an African village. I realised that courage to confront social issues and assert your view of what constitutes human

dignity and integrity, were permanent existential struggles regardless political geographies, and time. Emerson prevailed over the American society of his time. I realised that non-conformity with an order you do not agree with does not make one *a rudderless rebel* nor *a lost sheep.* It also dawned on me seeing God in a different way from how others saw it, did not necessarily make one a '*bad person,* or a *sinner*. From his writing, I affirmed that indeed God has given me all the powers to decide the course of my Life; and that I only needed to pray for strength and guidance, as difficulties arise (as indeed God already knew I was bound to encounter such difficulties --- knowing everything about the circumstances before I was born). Ralph Waldo Emerson: wrote:

> *"Man, house and architect, performer and spectator, all in one; armed only with his innate and inherent Nature, hacks and quarries his desired goal to arrive" …… The living Heavens thy prayers respect, House at once and architect, Quarrying man's rejected hours, builds there-with eternal towers; Sole and self – commanded works, Fears not undermining days, grows by decays, and by the famous might that lurks in reaction and recoil, makes flame freeze and ice to boil……".*

Certainly, before I was born, I had been given all I need to hack and quarry the obstacles on my way, remove them by whatever means available to me, towards achieving goals --- whatever they are, despite the odds—regardless of how daunting they may appear or pretend they are.

*"It is only as a man puts off all foreign support and stands alone that I see him to be strong and to prevail. He is weaker by every recruit to his banner. Is not a man better than a town? Ask nothing of men, and, in the endless mutations, thou only firm column must presently appear the upholder of all that surrounds thee. He who knows that power is in born, that he is weak because he has looked for good not out of him but elsewhere, and, so perceiving, throws himself unhesitatingly on his thought, instantly rights himself, stands in the erect position, commands his limbs, works miracles, just as a man who stands on his feet is stronger than a man who stands on his head".*

I self-servingly and perhaps mischievously, understood the phrase *"a man who stands on his head"* to mean people who have nothing else to show than their birth rights --- the achievements of their parents. In no less damning words than mine, Ralph Waldo Emerson criticized the cowardly indolence of people who idly sit around to moan and cry, blaming circumstances, for their laziness and consequent failures. He described such people as

*"Parlour soldiers (who) shun the rugged battle of faith where strength is born".*

From then, I was transformed from being just an *"arrogant upstart, a lost sheep .... etc",* to a feared fierce trouble hunter, who was all out searching for my critics. I noticed that as I began to behave like a philosophically drunk fanatic, not many

were anxious to earn a lash of my tongue. Indeed, it seemed that they tried their best not to. What stirred me and made my blood boil as if Emerson had personally advised me, was when he wrote:

> *"Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail"*

For me, that was it, a clincher. I had to establish my owe trail and leave a footprint that guide others after me, to help them get somewhere from nowhere.

Like every young man in college at the time, I swallowed Marxism hook-line-and-sinker. I was a dangerously typical ideology-drunk sailor in the North American students' circuits of the 1970s. It is honest to state that, consequent upon this resurgence of self-righteousness, I was sometimes too brash and disdainful in my attitude, always feeling unnecessarily self-righteous and invincible. I did anything I wanted with ruthless self-confidence, which may not have considered the ego of the other people. And I may have carried this attitude too far, and in some instances, with devastating consequences or crushing impact, on whatever or whoever stood on my way.

In retrospect, I humbly admit that I plunged into the world without setting specific tangible goals for myself. All I wanted was to leapfrog myself and my family to the highest socio-economic class by acquiring wealth, through the aid and benefits of first-class education. I knew that my biggest advantage in life was my intellect. I felt I belonged to the

exclusive caste of those endowed by God with an abundance of human intellect, as a *special asset and raw material*. I believed that anything that was not handed to me as my inheritance by birth, was more than compensated for by the gift of intellect --- and I had a duty to use it in powering a new trajectory for my lineage and humanity. I had to muddle through every step towards this goal, stumbling into obstacles and bumping my head at it to break through, borrowing and improvising whatever I needed along the way, without a defined strategy. I rather simply meet head on, any challenge that pops up on my path. I was like a transceiver in space, whose signals are scrambled, trying to find an appropriate energy frequency and antenna to connect. Come to think of it now, it was indeed the only potent strategy available to me. When you are bereft of the basic material tools and resources to attain your goal, conventional approaches are cruelly not an option. You then do exactly whatever you have to, within the law, in order to achieve your goal. But you must first steel yourself for bruises. I did. And I have no self-sympathy, regrets or apology, for many self-inflicted wounds. Thank God they did not putrefy and become cancerous.

Beyond my philosophical armour and disposition, I *always* needed spiritual weapons and inner convictions. I leaned heavily on my Christian faith. I borrowed a leaf from the encounter Moses allegedly had with God (Book of Exodus, *Chapter 14 verses 9 to 21).* When Moses was faced with the threat of drowning and perishing in the Red Sea, he put his *faith in God* to test. Without any scientific or physical evidence of it, Moses believed that God would intervene in his desperate

moment, even when neither him, his followers, nor their cause, were entirely righteous. Moses was human. All humans panic in the face of death, except the few possessed by a paranormal force. Moses was among those rare human beings. Other than allow himself to be consumed by the fear in the instant moment, he defied it and stood resolute.

> *"Do not be afraid", he commanded. "Standstill and see the salvation of the Lord which He will accomplish for you today", he said (Exodus Chapter 14, verse 13).*

It is important to understand what happened here. First, Moses spiritually psyched his Mind to rise beyond the physical reality facing him. He did not succumb to the threats and intimidation of the huge physical military force against him. That was his weapon. Then he invoked the enormous *Para-normal Power* that is always present in other dimension, *faith*. And God was pleased and responded favourably because Moses was unwavering in his belief that God has the power to intervene in his favour without being judgmental under those circumstances. Even so, I noted that God could have answered Moses by just waving Its hands at the sea and order it to give way. *But God did not do that.* Instead, God allegedly asked Moses to *use whatever he had,* a mere rod, to strike the sea, and thereby force the sea to give way!! Moses obeyed, *and the sea parted*!!!

I also found it instructive that in the biblical story of *Gideon* (Book of Judges, Chapters 6 and 7), Gideon was making excuses for himself because he lacked the courage to do the

needful. He fabricated mental and physical handicaps as excuses; and he made unnecessary demands, which he imagined were preconditions for success --- *something someone else should give him, as a pre-condition for him to go to work*. He said that he needed about 30,000 soldiers in order to fight. In effect, Gideon was saying that unless the conditions are ideal and perfect, he would not lift a finger to fight for his life, and his people's. But God said to him: *Gideon, quit creating excuses and get on with the job. Use what you have, 300 men, not 30,000!*

I am not exactly anyone's model of a Christian. Nor am I a zealot of any faith community or congregation. Till date, I am not sure that these biblical narratives are true. But they provide deep insight of how things work, when we deliberately defy and refuse to concede power to our physical limitation; and instead, take our fate into our own hands to challenge the odds we face --- taking whatever action is available to us. It is only then, that a miracle ignites. *We thereby kick-start our mind to hop to another energy level, another realm of realities, even if they are esoteric.* Miracles are possible, only when we defy the odds. *If the highest mountain ranges and the ocean bodies can be crossed, every obstacle created by man or society can also be overcome, if we try*. That is my faith. You may sometimes fall and crack your skull, but you would never know your lucky number, until you cast the dice. To fall is not the same as to fail. Our own fears are often our biggest obstacles. What we perceive as obstacles are often self-inflicted, self-disabling, self-limiting and self-defeating creations of your own mind.

All these were very revealing and spiritually invigorating and enlightening for me. All excuses of handicaps as reason for not trying to challenge the odds are not the reason for failure. By failing to challenge the odds, you only succeed in handing over the same baton of misery you inherited, to the next generation of your lineage. Someone must stop it, even at the risk of crashing to pieces. The energy you expended in your unsuccessful efforts to climb regardless of how dangerously steep it is from the bottom of the pit to the surface, even if in your attempts you fall to pieces and your skull is crushed and your brain becomes a cosmic powder, the energy you expended in your unsuccessful effort, shall become a quantum field energy frequency, which will connect future generations of your descendants to heights beyond the skies; and will arise, like a Phoenix, from the floor of the pit on which you stood and attempted to climb up and out.

*"It is only as a man puts off all foreign support and stands alone that I see him to be strong and to prevail. He is weaker by every recruit to his banner. Is not a man better than a town? Ask nothing of men, and, in the endless mutations, thou only firm column must presently appear the upholder of all that surrounds thee. He who knows that power is in born, that he is weak because he has looked for good out of him and elsewhere, and, so perceiving, throws himself unhesitatingly on his thought, instantly rights himself, stands in the erect position, commands his limbs, works miracles, just as a man who stands on his feet is stronger than a man who stands on his head".*

I realised early in life, in the battlefield of Biafra's War for Independence, *that power is in born, ...; that* I will be weak and self-defeating, if I indulge in self-pity. Indeed, a Fighting Spirit is the efficacious weapon in the battlefield for the goals of any life. We want things done for us; and we feel entitled. But Life's Struggles are Battles of *the Mind*. You win, the moment you decide that, regardless of the odds, losing is not an option. But once you allow yourself the luxury of excuses and procrastination, and expect help to come *elsewhere* outside yourself, you become a dead *"parlour soldier, who shuns the rugged battle of faith where strength is born".*

Yes, my circumstances were quite dire. I had no material support from anybody. I owed no one success or failure. No one could say that he or she invested a dime or me, except my mother. I had no *legacy path* to trail, no footsteps to follow. Therefore, I marched light. I did not have the burden and baggage proving anything to anyone, except to myself. Hence, I had no need to "*go where the path may lead".* My challenge was clear: to go "*instead where there is no path and leave a trail",* my own trail. That, in a way, was quite relieving and invigorating. It was enough for me to get going; and I bid Oyibo good luck. May his Mighty God protect, guard, and guide him.

The night before I took that dreadful leap of fate, I disclosed my plot to my mother. I remember clearly what the atmosphere was, as I sat with her in our mud thatched hut lit by a kerosine lantern. My cosmic friend, Onyebuchi, was there too. It was a harmattan evening. The climate then was different in onset of

seasons, from the present. My mother was silent for a while. She could tell when my mind is made up. As usual, she would hide her fears, exactly as she did that other evening in April 1967, when I told her I was joining the Army, in the midst of rumours of imminent war. I knew her well enough not to play games on her mind, by denying the possibility of a war breaking out, and that I may be sent to a battlefield. It would have been of absolutely no use. When my mother heard I was joining the Army, she simply looked at me without blinking. Till today, I cannot imagine her sadness and pain at the thought of my being killed in the violent war, a calamity that would have been totally unbearable, and would have certainly ended her life. I had rehearsed this dreadful moment several times. How would I tell her that I had chosen to gamble with the only thing she had in this world? But I did not have many other options. It was my only opportunity to put my just acquired GCE certificate to use, a proof to myself that I had risen beyond the ranks of millions of those destined for menial jobs, simply because the society could not help them go beyond primary school education. My mother was very joyful when I got the results for that examination, only a few weeks before this moment. Did I struggle all these years only to get a certificate to enable me commit suicide? Did I not know that I had chosen to race into open arms of death and embrace it, instead of patiently tarrying with my mother a little bit longer, as indeed we had done over the years? Could my mother be whispering to herself: *Oh, is it really true, that Emesieobi was never mine, that he is Ogbanje, one of those who come into world with no intention to stay, but to quickly consume and greedily exhaust the love of a mother, only to wickedly break*

*her heart and die in their youth*? She had heard so before. To date, I cannot imagine what raced through her extraordinarily powerful mind those moments, as she sat there in silence, stilly staring at me, and the abyss. Those few movements before she spoke seemed like eternity. I was really shaking in my boots. Then my mother said*: "Emesieobi, look into my eyes, and promise me that you will come back alive, no matter the battle front they may send you to fight".* The picture of that moment remains with me, and will, forever. I nodded my head and walked away for a few minutes. She knew what I was dealing with.

There is this sacred secret code we shared since my childhood. I learnt very early that my mother hid her pains and vulnerabilities from me. Later on in life, I realised that she was dying in silence, by always trying to be strong before me. That was because people believed that a male child raised by a woman, will be *soft*, and cannot endure the harsh rigours of life, any form of pains, particularly emotional pains. I was aware of this fact, and I responded to it by hiding my pains from her, always pretending to be strong.

On this evening in December 1971, it was her that made me a promise. I knew she was afraid when I frankly (perhaps too brutally) told her I was embarking on an unprecedented reckless risk and gamble of such a dangerous escapade as breaking out of Africa. Yes, she was afraid. But she also knew that my mind was made up. Still staring at me, as if she was looking beyond my temporal being, *my mother promised me that if death came for her when I am in a faraway unknown*

*foreign land, she would pray for me with the last breath of her life.* I pretended I was thirsty and fetched myself a cup of water. I could not bear it anymore. A cup of water was necessary. My behaviour at that moment is typical of what some people, in later years, mischaracterised as *my arrogant aloofness.* Saying I was confused is an intellectualization of a feeling that cannot be described by words. As I stood there looking at my mother, it seemed eternal impenetrable darkness had sealed and enfolded two of us in its blanket of cruelty. My mouth dried up any fluid or saliva it may have had only a minute ago. What did I just do?! Did I just inject into my mother's bloodstream a lethal but slow killing poison? Why did I not just go ahead and gamble away my life, without cruelly killing her with such information? A force beyond emotion threw me into my mother's embrace. When we let go of each other, all the tears had been so much so that we were each drying his or her face and sneezing.

> *And many were my afflictions. More are my human frailties and foibles. But always, whenever my distress threated to consume and overwhelm my Soul, I reached out for spiritual balms to sooth it. Oh God, if indeed You rule the heavens and all else, let this never come to pass that she suffers the cruel fate of facing death would die praying for me with the last breath of her life, when I am still in a faraway unknown foreign land.*

I never forgot my mother's promise. I also swore to do all I could as a human being; to make sure she did not *die when I am still in a faraway unknown foreign land*. This pledge never

left my mind, even for a second, wherever I may be, whatever I may be up to.

It is not an unfair allegation to say I left Nigeria soon after the Civil War as a wretched desperate young man.

I built the current between in 1993-94, after I had returned to Nigeria in 1987, and gone through bruising battles to penetrate the Nigerian Federal Government business cartel, by selling IDEAS to it. Yes, Ideas and Brain Power, *nothing else*. The second page is a transitional house I built for my mother and myself (1982 – 1993) in our old compound and ancestral home, at Umueke Ekerifeze Umuajata Olokoro, when I was still struggling as an Engineer with Rockwell International, Aerospace Division, in El Segundo, a neighbourhood of Los Angeles. Indeed, I started moulding the blocks for it in 1976 when I was still a student, using my earnings as a janitor, a job I did for years to support myself. Almost every kobo I earned as Youth Corper in Hadeja, Kano State (now Jigawa State) also went into that project.

That house at Umueke, the old compound, is my proudest accomplishment. I do not think that anything else I did, thereafter, impressed my mother that much. For her, that house at Umueke was a loud social statement. She had become a member of a caste that lived in a house with pipe borne water and electricity. It was not quite completed in 1982, when my first son, Dike Okebaram, was born. My mother named Dike "*Okebaram*", meaning, I too have got my own share. It was too emotional for her: I was a man, with a family, and had built

a modern house albeit an incomplete one then. Though we lived in it uncompleted, I think I had my own sense of accomplishment from the two events. I was a man with a son, and a house where my mother could live without dodging raindrops from leaky roof of a thatched house. I had become a "*Dike",* a conqueror, an overcomer! My daughter, Chioma Ihekoromama Onyebueke, was my first child to live in the said old house as a fully furnished house with all the basic comforts as in an average middle-class home in Europe or America, plus a garage with a family car parked in it (brand new Peugeot 505 with air-conditioning). I must also mention or explain here that "*Ihenkoromama*" was the name my mother gave to Chioma. It means: "that, which I, a Mama, lacked"; she had neither a female child nor the 'luxuries' she was now blessed with. She named every other child of mine to tell her life story. She named Amara "Okezie", a philosophical expression of God's fairness to everyone in distributing wealth. She named Nnabugwu "Önyenyirichi", an epilogue telling the story of the life of poverty I lived with her. "Onyenyirichi" means that no human being is beyond God or has the power to stop what God has said shall be. She was referring to all the insults, derisions and humiliations we had been through, and the sharp contrast to what we had become by the time Nnabugwu was born (in 1992).

# THE SOJOURNER WITHOUT MEANS, AN ADVENTURER WITHOUT EYES.

God is not as in the Image and Mind of Men. The Universe works, not by laws known to us, but by some logic ever beyond our Reasoning.

> *All events and acts of men during a lifetime, will always be connected as dots are, in a straight line. They appear zig zag only when viewed from lenses of limited distance, and an aperture of narrow vision field. Just as our Ancestors at the onset of the Anthropocene were baffled by Lightning and other Forces of Nature, so shall Humanity ever be confounded by the Essences of what Albert Einstein described as "Spooky Action at A Distance", the yet to be understood phenomena by which entities separated by billions of light years in space-time, stay in contact with other, and influence each other's behaviour—the yet understood "Implications of Quantum Entanglements".*

Yes, more than anything else, I was always somehow, even mysteriously, in touch with my mother, no matter where circumstances roamed me. She was the gravity that moored my rickety raft to a shore, despite the violence and turbulence of the Sea. Oh, what a Solid Rock to spiritually lean on. Her words that last evening, before I embarked on my "*Reckless Quest".*

Only by the beneficial hindsight of the above statements, can I or anyone dare say that my wandering around globe during all the 1970s, was not a foolhardy adventure without a compass, particularly those who deny existence of yet to be identified force fields. It is when time is stretched from its violent birth to its absolute infinite, that it may seem like I was propelled by a fortune's rocket, into a spatial orbit. But the reality is that my journey has been like a ride on crest of a sinusoidal wave, the peaks and dips always struggling to define their central function, a common derivate point, pre-determined and imposed by fate. Even in the midst of the most extreme down-swing of fortune, I had faith. I believed that *His anger is but for a moment, and His favour is for life* (Psalms 30 v 5)

On that cold winter day when my eyes first saw snow, and beheld the beautiful snow caped Alps, I was filled with excitement and wonder, hope and fears. *I believed that all who made it so far, never came back to where they started*, even if they were among the wretched of the Earth, as indeed I was, till that day. But this was a colonial mindset. It was the standard then. Anyone housed in *European Quarters,* in any city in Nigeria, either came back from *Ala Bekei*, or is one of the then few, who had seen the four walls of a university. May by God it would so also be same for me. May the *Fair Heavens* never let it be that at the end of it all my adventure is a metaphoric warning as a start warning and threat, to all who strive and struggle to be --- let my story never be a cause for melancholy for those whose burden it is, to shame the tyranny and injustice

of inequity constructed by Man. Oh, no, it shall not be the story of:

*breath of light overwhelmed by the void it was birthed in.*

Oh, please God, in your infinite mercy, let this moment not be the first stanza of the dirge solemnising how the gentle flickering glow of a lone candle was mercilessly snuffed out by the raging storm --- how the light, though trembled, galvanized courage for a delicate dance even when on the edge of extinction; but then the darkness closed in, an impenetrable shroud extinguished all hope, and the flame's faint pulse, no match for the crushing weight of the shadows, let go of its feeble last breath in silence, in a thunderous protest against all that is unjust, in a lyle where the outcry against injustice is forever numbed in a rhyme of despair and death; how in the depths of darkness, a lone candle flickered, a final, futile protest, as the light's soft whisper was drowned out by the thunderous roar of darkness; a solitary beam of light pierced the void, only to be devoured by the all-consuming darkness; and the flame's desperate struggle was a brief, brave flash in the all-encompassing Eternal Night.

Not quite exactly in the words, rhyme and rhythm, but that was my silent prayer and soliloquy. I quickly averted my mind to the immediate reality. The Swiss Immigration desk was before me. I spoke neither German nor French. And, I had no passport! What I had was something called *West African Travel Certificate*. It looked like a passport, and so far, it had worked for me. But will the Swiss fall for it? The Officer, a lady, looked

into my eyes and smiled. To my surprise and relief, she spoke perfect English, or so it sounded then: *You have very beautiful eyes, how did you get them,* she said, as she stamped *my passport,* and handed it back to me!

I was beyond ecstatic, more-so as Onyebuchi was also waived through. We had no luggage to clear Customs. They did not even ask any question. *We were in Europe, Switzerland of all places!*

*Then what Next?* Onyebuchi and I seemed to be asking each other, as we trembled. It was just too cold out here. We had no winter clothes, just what we he had on, when we left hot Africa. I had read of the destitution of Africans who smuggled themselves into Europe, how they hid themselves and slept at public places in the winter under extremely cold condition. I had read of how they hurriedly got out the next morning and went to places, where they washed dishes in order to eat leftovers. I had read the *African Child*, by Camara Laye. I braced myself for whatever hardship I may face upon arrival in Europe. Instead, I was provided comfort and shown genuine love by the Catholic Church Monks.

*The Mother Church never failed me.* Contacts had been made for our rescue upon arrival. My first night in Europe, my first night ever outside Africa, was at *Benedictine Abbey in Engelberg, in Canton Obwalden, Switzerland*. It remains for me, *a Home*, in the deepest and most comprehensive sense of the word. My last pilgrimage to it was in 2016. May I hope to return again, please

God (indeed I did, in 2016). For the first time in my life, I had the security of eating *whatever I wanted*, to my fill.

A few months after being residents of a Monastery, they paid for us to enrol for German language classes in Zurich. Onyebuchi and I gladly left the regimented life of the Monks in *Engelberg,* a rural community in the Alps. We got accommodation in *Justinusheim*, an international student's hostel in Sonnenberg, Zurich, Freudenbergstrasse 146. It was my first time of living on my own as a tenant in a rented accommodation. Life was good. There, I was exposed to people from all over the world. In those days in Switzerland, any African, except white Rhodesians and South Africans, was your brother. And it felt real. I met students (and political dissidents) from third world countries, which then which India, Ceylon, Pakistan, Bahrain, Columbia, Mexico, Cuba, Honduras, etc. I also saw victims and survivors of other wars from other third world countries. I saw Cambodians, Malaysians, Koreans, Indonesians and Vietnamese, from Angola, Zaire, Ethiopia, etc. Canton Zurich Einwohnermeldeamt fur Auslander (Foreign Resident Registration Office) granted *me Arbeitsgenehmigung*, a permission to work. Onyebuchi got one too. Life was good. All I had to do was, wake up, attend German language lessons for about five hours, and the rest of the day was mine. I could work and earn almighty *Swiss francs.* Before the end of that Summer, I got admission into University of Zurich, and also to University of Freiburg, Freiburg. I chose Freiburg. But Switzerland was not where I wanted to be. Meanwhile, I had been introduced to the Nigerian Embassy at No. 10 Belpstrasse in Bern by Dr Louis

Nwoku, a native of Umuahia like myself. He was then a renowned Dental Surgeon in Zurich. Despite his stature, respect and influence, the Nigerian Embassy could not grant my application for a passport. They were mad at the Swiss for *breaking protocol* by granting us entry among other favours, when I did not have a standard Nigerian passport. They suspected that it was an expression of good old sympathy for Biafra! None of their concerns made any sense to me. How were they to know that my plight started long before Biafra? How could they have known that I was denied the Eastern Nigeria Government scholarship in 1962 because of how other people voted, which I had no control over. How were they to know that any action against my right as a Nigerian citizen would only open another war front, set me back to begin all over again from where I was in 1962. Onyebuchi had warned me not to take that risk, but I could not listen because I was hell-bent on getting out of Switzerland, for America, my *Dream Land*. However, the Ambassador (*Mr. Abebe*), privately assured me that a passport shall eventually be issued to me as a matter of right, but that he must first do the things he must do, in compliance with laid down protocols and guidelines. He gave me some Swiss francs out of his pocket and advised that I take every advantage of whatever opportunity Switzerland had meanwhile availed me. He told me of his personal anguish during that brutal war, that he lost his best friend, and his fellow *Treddaian* (?) when they were students at the University of Ibadan.

Several months later, I got a letter from the Nigeria Embassy asking me to come for my passport. It was issued within

minutes. Unfortunately, the Ambassador was not in the Office on that day. I never met him again to say, *Thank you very much, Sir.* I understand that before Lagos authorized the passport, the Ambassador had written several letters. He had also sent a *mild protest* note the Swiss Federal Government as a formal protest. He did so to assure Lagos that there was nothing malicious in the unnecessary imbroglio. As was the tradition then, the Nigerian Embassy officials visited us, Nigerian Students in the Universität Freiburg. They had updated me on what was going on behind the scenes on my passport issue, *just a normal diplomatic cat and mouse game*, they said. Indeed, at a point, I almost lost interest in the issue, except that I needed a standard Nigerian passport to get into North America, Canada or the United States, which ever I could wangle my way into. Meanwhile, as the Ambassador had kindly counselled me, I made sure I attended my classes and passed my tests at the Universität Freiburg. Canton Freiburg policy is that for a foreign student to maintain his residential status, he must at least score a pass mark in no less than five classes in a semester. I did, while I waited. In those days, all you needed was a valid Nigerian passport to enter any Commonwealth country, UK, Canada, etc. We could also enter Germany for visa free, for a three-month *holiday.* Nigerian students were among the most respected and sought after students. We had not acquired our often-taunted notoriety for all sorts of crimes. Above all, Nigeria was an ambitiously developing country. Indeed, sometimes I wonder if the crash of our economy and our financial decline, is not synonymous with our present status as undesired elements on allegations of our criminality. However, I was lucky that mine

was the time when a young Nigerian student could roam around nearly all Europe. My characteristic boundless imagination (or fantasies) could not let such opportunity pass me, even if I did not have a dime in my pocket. In fact, as early as 1972, as soon as I got my passport, I began trying to be a rich student. I started buying and shipping used cars to Nigeria, where I sold them for some handsome profit. Back then in 1972, such cars were called *Home Delivery*, or whatever Nigerian chose to tag them. Two decades later, they became known as Tokunbo. I am among the first Nigerians to ply that trade. The rumour in Olokoro then was that I abandoned being a student for making money. What was their business in whatever I chose to do? Was I on their scholarship or anybody's? I asked then.

Nonetheless, at the same, I started plying the same trade by buying used cars in Switzerland and selling them in Damascus ---- driving through Milan to Trieste in Italy; Milan, Ljubljana to Zagreb in Yugoslavia (now Croatia); Zagreb to Belgrade to Sofia (Bulgaria); . Edirne to Istanbul to Bursa, Gaziantep (Turkey); Gaziantep to Aleppo to Damascus (Syria), were I sold the cars for a few dollars profit. Syrian Customs would stamp my passport to show that I entered the country with a car, and that I should drive it out of Syria or pay import duty. I would leave Damascus and sneak into Lebanon, through an almost non-existed porous border, in order to evade detection by Syrian Customs for bringing and selling a car in Syria without paying duty. I recall with goosebumps an event that I narrated to my children many years ago. On one of such ventures, I slapped a Bulgarian officer at the border. He had called me a Nigger, even

when I had not opened my mouth. With me was Abiel Akotchi from Sudan, who I had hired to drive one of the cars from Freiburg in Switzerland to Damascus. Dark, above six feet and very muscular, Abiel was an intimidating personality. He was right behind me and got out of the car immediately he saw what was happening.

However, eventually that day came, when I boarded *Air Canada* in Zurich for Montreal Canada. The second stage of my Odessey has started.

I had with me Cooks Travelers Cheques of about five thousand dollars that I had saved from the used car business. But most important, and most valuable, was a letter from *Benedictine Abbey in Engelberg,* to another *Benedictine Abbey in* Mission City, British Columbia, Canada. I later learned from a young Monk, just about my age, that the Swiss Abbey informed their colleagues in Canada, that they were sorry they could not persuade me to stay in Switzerland and complete my college education. They also requested the Abbey in Mission City to give me any assistance I may need, and pledged their readiness to provide further support, if necessary. I was beyond grateful.

It is not necessary here to go into details of how and when Onyebuchi and I eventually set foot on the soil of United States of America, a country that eventually became my nationality. Such details remain sealed under the pact I mentioned earlier. Besides, it was Goethe, the German philosopher, who cautioned that a truth that could hurt need not be told, except when not

telling it could cause harm to someone else. I do not think that my not going into such details, in the instant case, could possibly cause harm to anyone. Indeed, the backbone story of *my most dangerous life gamble and risk was the daring foolhardy move* was to venture into Europe. From that day, I knew I would eventually end up in the United States. That is where, for reasons beyond the rational, I had come to believe that I belonged to. Looking back now, I recall how I hungered for the land of John F. Kennedy, the homeland of the *Peace Corps* whose carefree lifestyles had captured my imagination right from my primary school days. They were not as arrogant as *other white people* I had seen, except the Irish Reverend Fathers. I remember that some of them amazed me by trying to speak Igbo, unlike the English who imposed their language. I had also chosen to study *Geography of the North America* for my O/ Level GCE. I fell in love with just about anything American, except the assassination of the Kennedys and Martin Luther King jr. But even then, I did not really know much about the *Race Issue*. More in my mind were photos of the "*American Negroes"* marching for freedom. I noticed that they were wearing what was then to me very expensive suits and ties, with sunglasses to match. I saw photos of their big cars. What else could anyone ask for? Well, if having *these things* is what poverty is for these people, I better get there quickly and become one of them. I was a voracious ardent reader of every issue of Time Magazine and Newsweek. I read whatever copy I could lay my hands on, no matter how old the edition. *No, America for sure was Heaven, if one could work hard,* I told myself. And I could. I just wanted to get in there, and become an American, period. And I did.

One thing that most impressed me about America was that nobody immediately concluded you were a foreigner, not until you open your mouth. Even then, there was the phrase: *"I mean, originally"*, that often followed the question: "where do you come from"? You can live and work *illegally,* for as long as you want, and nobody would ever disturb you, unless you exposed yourself by getting entangled with law enforcement agencies. I gathered all these impressions by reading anything I could find about the United States of America. I was not disappointed when I eventually got there. *Oyibo, just join the rat race as quickly as you can and start slugging your way, like anybody else.*

The first thing Onyebuchi pointed out to me was that the cost of food and housing was much cheaper in the US, than in Canada, even as wages in the US were a bit higher than in Canada then. Frankly speaking, America posed no challenge or any more difficulty, that I did not anticipate, more-so, after an Engineering degree in my pocket. I felt like a prince when the big corporations were literally *harassing* me with job offers, through their head-hunters. I felt that *I had arrived.*

But I still needed to get one business behind me. I had to come back to Nigeria for National Youth Service, among the second batch. I needed to do that because I did not want the untenable situation of coming later, with a family to provide for, to be asked to go for Youth Service before getting a job. *But why bother with the idea of ever going back to Nigeria to seek employment, when obviously and self-evidently, you are materially and otherwise much better off, here in the US*? Most

of my colleagues asked me that question. I could not expose myself by obliging them an answer. The way I had conducted myself over the years, and the reputation I had earned, made it seem to them that *my story* was a fairy tale fiction, even back then, in 1977. Nothing would have made anyone around me, except Onyebuchi, believe that I come from any other background than the affluent. *Oyibo, you better shut up your big mouth. Nobody will believe our story*, Onyebuchi often said. And I obeyed.

But *my story* got even more incredible, when, upon return to Los Angeles after National Youth Service in Nigeria, I hopped into the plane again, almost immediately, to take up a *UN fellowship* at Trinity College, Dublin Ireland. That was meant for the elite, who could afford to defer making money immediately upon graduation. Certainly, not for someone of my background, not in those days. Indeed, the notion of a year of study in Europe, till today, is a fantasy, which only the spoilt brats of America indulged. This fact became even more clear to me in Trinity College, when I noticed that the American students there were children of Irish American wealth aristocracy. They were almost invariably studying Gaelic Culture, Irish history, folk music and literature. These are people whose financial future is solidly secured. To them, I was a little bit of a curiosity, whenever they learnt that I came for the program *from the US*? *That's not exactly what black folks from America do,* they often muted. On the long run, leaving the US for Trinity College paid off quite handsomely. I later found out how ethnic cronyism works behind the scenes in the US. Whenever and wherever I was interviewed

for a job by a panel headed by an American of Irish descent, it seemed that *M. Sc. Trinity, Dublin* in my curriculum vitae instantly placed me a notch above other candidates, even in cases where I knew I was asking for much higher entry salary than others. That was exactly what happened during my vetting for employment with Rockwell International, North American Aerospace Division, in El Segundo, California in 1979. There was always that exclamation of a kindred bond: *"Oh, gee, you went to Trinity? How did you like Ireland"?*

My days with Rockwell were my best, as an ambitious young engineer. It will never be fair of me to allege that I was ever stepped over, for either a promotion or a raise. Indeed, my rise to the position of *Program Supervisor, Manufacturing Systems Data Base*, before returning to Nigeria in 1987, was meteoric among my set. Before then, towards the end of 1981, Patrick O'Donnell, Programs Director, Manufacturing System, had approved my application for a Ph. D program in Robotics on half pay, at PINY, the Polytechnic Institute of New York by fall of 1982. The idea was scrubbed when news from Nkechi Nwosu reached me that my first son, Dike, was on his way. Half pay, half of my annual salary as it was in 1982, could not bear my new responsibilities. I learnt with deep pains that Pat lost his life when his boat capsized in Hawaii in 1998. May his lovely Soul rest in peace. When I confided in Pat my intention to leave Rockwell, Pat creamed, "*What? Obi, are you ok? Have you told your boss? Go and sleep over this, before you tender a formal letter of resignation. Meanwhile, you have not told me anything".* Pat was on the Executive Board that hired me in

1979. When I became *an Insider*, I learned that his nickname in Rockwell is *Irishman.* He was an alumnus MIT, *the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.* His son and daughter also graduated from MIT.

As stated earlier, I returned to Nigeria from the United States of America in 1987 and went through bruising battles to penetrate the Nigerian Federal Government business cartel by selling *Ideas and Brain Power*. Once again, I repeat for emphasis: *Brain power and Ideas.* Yes, Ideas, an energy field that the Divine allows the Universe to emit and propagate everywhere in the Universe, with absolutely neither toll to pay as a barrier for access, nor a requirement for any artifact as a tool for access.

And Brain Power, the greatest resource each human being brought to the Planet without any effort. But often, unfortunately, not every individual gets a fair chance and opportunity to develop them.

I think that is what I wondered round the globe to acquire – the conventional framework with necessary tools and institutions within which I can express and crystalize my ideas, and opportunity to develop my brain and validate its prowess. *The first of two of my objectives have been achieved.*

Before returning to Nigeria, I made sure I had not only a sound education, but also in addition, I also had *a very thorough and deep understanding of how a country develops a national backbone for its Technology Sector* ---- something only an

insignificant number of Nigerians of my generation really understood. Nigeria was a very ambitious fast developing African nation in those days. By 1977, two or three jobs were waiting for every graduate.

My professional career began with a brief internship at JPL, Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Los Angeles, California USA, as a graduate student (postgraduate). Upon completing graduate studies, I was employed by Rockwell International (North America Aerospace Division) in El Segundo California, where I was among the first generation of Rockwell's Engineers to develop a database for applying CAD-CAM technology for aircraft manufacturing, in compliance with directives and guidelines of DOD (Department of Defence). There and then, I fell in love with computers (Main frames then), and how they were interconnected for data transmission, creating what was known in those nascent days of the technology, as *Information Super-Highway*. What an exaggeration. I think the fastest speed I worked with was a 32 kbps (kilobits per second) terminal, linking my desk in El Segundo, to our plant in Palmdale, California! Yes, that was as fast as it could be, way back then. This speed is scandalously embarrassing for 21 century geeks. But remember, we had no Fiber optic cables in those days, just good old narrow bank coax cable.

I was so fascinated by this technology that I was often the first to get to work every day, and the last to quit. Even if Rockwell had asked me to work for a much lower sum than my entry salary of $60,000.00 per year in 1977, I would have gladly done so. I

believe I am the first African exposed to this technology which, in 1978 and 1979, was a classified expertise. Only individuals with *Class A Security Clearance* were allowed. This later blossomed in a robust career in data communications and Technology in Rockwell, where I believe I became one of the pioneers in *Management Information Systems Development*. This was right at the birth and infancy of what decades later became known as the Internet digital revolution. Very few people in the world knew or used the Internet daily as early as 1977 – 79. It was really a privilege then. I rose to the position of Program *Supervisor, Manufacturing Systems*, before returning to Nigeria in 1987. I remain eternally grateful to the United States of America and the culture of its corporations for the opportunities and exposures I was availed. I firmly believe that despite its imperfections (and they are legion), it is still a land committed to equal opportunity and redressing the grievances caused by its past history.

# THE HOME COMING OF A WANDERER, BURDENS, AND TRIBULATIONS OF A PATRIOT

When I returned to Nigeria in early 1987, Nigeria was under one of her regimes of military rules, which started from 1966 and continued till 1999, with only one short civilian interregnum (from 1979 – December 1983). My ultimate ambition was to create for Nigeria, a *Think-Thank* Organization*,* modelled after the RAND Corporation in USA. I had studied the origin of the RAND Corporation and its different fields of operations in developing scientific methodologies that enable the US government in analysing complex situations, make and implement efficient policy decisions. I realised that it started in 1946 and was built on the sheer infrastructure of human intellect, and not much more. The RAND objective was simple: to provide the US government the tools it needed for effective management of its resources, cutting wastes, and improving efficacy through scientific research and analysis. I believed I could replicate it in Nigeria. But I had neither capital nor *"Connections",* a very mischievous word in Nigeria that could mean *anything,* depending on the context. As is often the case, Ideas and Brain Power, can be rendered useless and even be derided as dubious Capital Assets in Nigeria, the *Almighty Connections* are absent.

Besides, I was a single parent. I returned to Nigeria with two minors (Dike, 5; and Chioma, 4). At that time also, Nigeria was in severe economic distress due to harsh reform programs imposed on the country by her international creditors --- the World Bank and its Brenton Institution allies. There were riots on the streets of Lagos. Based on these facts, I was not surprised that there was no short supply of cynics and sceptics, who raised eye brows and let all sorts of contours run on their faces when questioning why anybody with a head on his neck would choose to voluntarily return to Nigeria at such a time, when many were *checking out, the Andrews,* as economic emigrants of the 1980s were called.

But I had acquired immunity to the insinuations and allegations of this type of people who, unfortunately, I saw as nothing but scums, not even of nuisance value.

They never seemed to have learned any lesson. These were the same people who, upon hearing that I defied all odd and entered Europe in 1971, and thereon on to America, confidently forecasted and wagered that I would be apprehended and jailed for illegal entry into a foreign country and thereafter deported. It did not happen. When they heard that I had returned to Nigeria to do Youth Service, they said that their forecast of 1971 had been vindicated. They alleged that a grandaunt of any American or European University would never accept posting to such a harsh environment as Hadeija! When they heard that I had

proceeded to Dublin as a UN scholar for further postgraduate studies at Trinity College, their reaction was: *why Ireland? why couldn't he continue in America?*

As usual, my response to their innuendos was silence. Here again, I used the best weapon in my ordinance of armaments --- allow time for your achievements to be your voice.

When I returned to Nigeria, I announced to the world that I all brought from America back to Nigeria were three capital assets:

i. My natural intellect that had been sharpened to become a formidable capital asset by sound tertiary education and subsequent emersion in the world's cutting age technology of the time,
ii. My "*Brother's typewriter",* that would help me present what I had in my head on paper, and,
iii. A spirit to fight and make sure Nigeria did not exhaust and thrash me as it did to so many others before me, who, like me, had enthusiastically returned to Nigeria with utmost patriotic zeal, only to be forced by endemic Nigerian ailments, to return back to wherever they came from.

Indeed, my friends from all ethnicities, were genuinely concerned and worried when I told them I wanted to leave Los Angeles for Lagos. They were sincerely, obsoletely, horrified.

In fairness to the cynics and the genuine concerns of my truly sincere friends, Lagos in 1987 was not the most comfortable

place on Earth to migrate to, for someone used to a better than average living standard in Los Angeles, California. There was a lot of crises which worsened the economic hardship. Not only the relatively high cost of basic things like food, but there was also no pipe borne water at 101B Adeniyi Jones Ikeja, my first address in Nigeria. I used to buy water from rusty and rusted tankers from street water vendors. Power supply then was worse than today. I could reasonably mitigate these two problems. But there was an absolute hazard that I had the hardest time dealing with: there was no telephone service. Even those *connected enough* to have one, could hardly use it. These fortunate few used to assign their houseboys to hold the telephone receiver for hours, waiting for a dialling tone. Like power and water supply, there may be no dialling tone from your telephone handset for days! Ikeja was one of the worst exchanges in Nigeria. The *legacy network* was a nightmare. In addition, Lagos, being the epicentre of national activism was, a riot by itself. The twin indefatigable and courageously incorruptible *Oath Keepers of Nigeria*, Tai Solarin, and Gani Fawehmi, were in their hay days. They mobilized the labour unions in attempt to force the military government to hear the cries of the masses. Often, they too were locked up for their trouble. God bless their Souls. The vacuum they left are still being felt in every corner of Nigeria.

I was almost heart-broken and often could not bear looking into the eyes of my two minor children, who absolutely depended on my judgment, and did not have a say in my 'reckless and unreasonable decision' to move everyone to Nigeria. Given the

hardships in Nigeria at the time, I knew that, deep inside, they were silently wishing I had not done *this.*

But *Nigeria is now home*, I told everybody. My mind was made up, and nothing could change it.

In 1967, when I was an *Officer Cadet* in the *Eastern Command Nigerian Army School of Infantry* at Hill Top, Enugu, I learnt a few things that would serve me well decades later. Two of those were *Field Craft* and *Strategy.* Field Craft is the art of being a battlefield chameleon. You do not stick yourself out, like a sore thumb, otherwise all ammo in the rifle magazine of the other side shall be emptied at you. Nigerian bureaucrats do not take kindly to any *I-know- it-all* critic, more-so if he is coming from America. It is not that they have anything in particular against American College graduates. No. It is a combination of two prejudices. One, most of the upper echelon of the Nigerian bureaucrats are thorough-bred die-in-wool British orientated (particularly in the 1980s and earlier), be they trained in the UK or in Nigeria. They have a sort of pride (and perhaps arrogance) about them. *It is just plain good old English attitude*. Two, frontal confrontational is wrong tactics when the forces and resources at your command are overwhelmingly inferior to your opponents'. Cool down and find a relatively soft under-belly point, to aid of your penetration, which would otherwise be impossible.

The fact is that there are people from all over Nigeria, who are very committed, and open to trying new ideas or technique that could improve the quality of services they deliver to the public. *Don't trash and write off people due to preconceptions and prejudices of your own mind*. It is important to understand what I am saying here. I am not by any means saying that everyone in our public service is an angel. Far from it. I am saying that a *vast majority* are. But it is within the *majority* that you can inculcate and impart skills that will eventually ignite a critical mass effect toward positive changes in task performance capability, in public interest. *I tried to understand how the system presently works, and why.* First of all, I tried to understand the *Nigerian System*, the skills and tools available to those men and women in our public services, who try every day, *to the best of their ability,* to make or implement policies that influence and control the lives of over two hundred million (200,000,000) Nigerians.

I must confess that though life was initially quite tough and hard in those days, but below the surface, the military government was quite open to new ideas, processes, tools and innovations, that could improve the lives of Nigerians, more-so when the proposal is by a Nigerian. The military chaps were quite open minded. *The Babangida Administration* genuinely sought-out people with outstanding skills to help public servants, despite its *gold standard* of using corruption as a veritable control tool. My thorough experience and involvement in developing and using the most advanced and sophisticated tools for analysis of

processes for the manufacture of very complex machines like fighter jet aircrafts, and the management of the sophisticated information systems necessary to coordinate the effort towards the eventual configuration of such product, was handy and availing.

Even then, I did not start by flaunting my credentials and throwing my weight around. Nigerians would have quickly deflated it. Instead, I started very humbly and quietly. Of course, humility was my second nature, given where I started from, right at my birth. Unremarkably, I became a founding member of the Committee that guided the establishment of the *National Agency for Science and Engineering Infrastructure* (NASENI). I was appointed to that Committee by Prof Gordian Anekwe, then the Hon Minister of Science and Technology. I was also instrumental in developing precursors to modern Information Management Systems at the *Administrative Staff College, Topo, Badagry*. Additionally, I served as an adviser on heuristic-based decision-making at *National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies* (NIPSS), Kuru. Eventually, I consulted for the *Office of the National Security Adviser* (NSA), providing expert advice and guidelines for the development of a Cybercrime Unit. In all these capacities, I benefitted immensely from the good will and recommendations of other Nigerians, from various corners of Nigeria, who I did not know until 1987, when I returned to Nigeria.

My ventures include *Work Systems and Procedures*, a lone self-constituted *Think Tank*, through which I created databases, databanks, and provided technical solutions to public entities. Eventually, I attended international conferences as an external resource person for Nigeria's delegation, including the *OAU Conference on Information and Communications Technology* in Tunisia, with former President Obasanjo. Perhaps my highest venture is *Interstella* Communications Limited, the first private sector entity in Nigeria to build a nationwide high speed data communications infrastructure on optic Fiber backbone.

# MY FIRST BREAKS

What we know today as NITEL, Nigeria Telecommunications Ltd, emerged from the P&T, Post and Telegraphs, a Department under the Federal Ministry of Communications. NITEL was almost a stillbirth, due to the civil servant native mindset and orientation of its management. In those days, a call to anywhere in Nigeria, from anywhere in world, would first go to London, who would route it to Lagos. Lagos would keep the call *on-hold, until there is a trunk to connect the call to the city or town where local phone number is.* In some cases, it could take days for *International Call Operator* to get a free trunk to connect Lagos. Completion rate of such calls was less than twenty percent. Upon General Murtala Mohammed overthrowing General Yakubu Gowon, and assuming power as the Military Head of State, he tried to improve the archaic state of telephony in Nigeria by demerging telephone services from the Federal Ministry off Communication whereby P&T became NITEL. He also tried to introduce *IDD and DID* so that local telephone subscribers can make and receive calls from anywhere in Nigeria *without a trunk Operator Assistance and also reach any telephone number in the world (through IDD, Inwards Direct Dialling, and DID, Direct International Dialling respectively). International Telephone and Telegraph* (ITT), a US corporation was awarded contracts of several millions of dollars to build the requisite backbone infrastructures that would enable Nigeria to make quantum leap. ITT promptly appointed Chief Moshood Abiola to be its *Chairman for Africa.* Unfortunately, the noble

ambition of Murtala Mohammed was marred by ferocious scandals and unprecedented level of theft and corruption.

Under President Shehu Shagari, the dam cracked, and the Nigerian economic ship slowly began to take water. Fast wards through the 1980s and 1990s, it became clear to the FGN that reforms were imperative, and that telephony could not anymore be sustained by the FGN as a social indulgence of elite public servants, some business entities, and the very few privileged people in the society. NITEL, though an enterprise in which huge public funds had been invested over several decades, still depended on annual budgetary provisions by the FGN to function. NITEL had to mend its ways of doing business; and should at least pay its service delivery costs. But it miserably lacked the appropriate management tools to do so.

Along the line, it introduced *"Payment through Bank"* to eliminate fraud facilitated by burning records of service bills paid by telephone subscribers at Local Exchange Area offices known as cash office at the time. Complex problems arising from such policy switch without adequate planning. NITEL had no way of knowing who had paid how much, or into which bank. Both banks and subscribers were just too happy for the grand mess. NITEL was going broke, even as the whole country was its exclusive market, and demand for its services were literally exploding, so was its revenue base. Even worse, were problems of "unaccountable calls". These were international calls verifiably made through NITEL's network, and for which NITEL was billed during circuit count reconciliations and

*circuit balancing* sessions under ITU (International Telephony Organization Rules. NITEL's International Calls Operators were making a fortune at NITEL's expense. NITEL's management was desperate and needed the services of anyone who had the skills to help it out. I happened to be there and ready, at that moment, and at the right time, under such desperate circumstances or opportunities, that do not often present themselves. *Work Systems & Procedures Ltd,* and its alter ego, Obi Oyibo Barth Thompson, became a best-known solver of complex national problems. I became much sought after panellist on national issues, frequently aired on NTA, the only television network with national reach in Nigeria at the time.

Indeed, Nigeria was beseeched by several problems that needed expert input, beyond the usual Nigerian contractor image and reputation. It was time to retire the expiring tariff and custom duty regimes in Nigeria within UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD) recommendations. Nigeria needed her own local Intelligence on the subject, before pushing her future tariff trajectory. *She needed a framework for forecasting the impact of different tariff policy options on all critical sectors of economy*. This required the capacity to use GAMS, the *General Algebraic Modelling System,* developed by the World Bank Economic Development Centre in Washington DC, for mathematical optimization of both complex and nonlinear problems, and building forecasting models. UNCTAD, had literally outsourced to a French company the highly technical job of helping Nigeria with policy analysis and econometric

consultancy. That would have been fine and dandy, except that Nigeria was paying too handsomely for this service. Fortunately, I had friends in the right places, who not only put in words for me, but also shouted loudly that the job could be well done by a Nigerian entity. One is blessed to have friends like Isaac Aluko-Olokun (Nigerian Economic Forum), Olu Fadaka (then Permanent Secretary Finance, Budget and Planning) and Chris Olumese (Permanent Secretary, Budget Office). I don't think anyone raised a voice in either awarding the project to Work Systems & Procedures Ltd (Obi Barth Oyibo Thompson), or the amount payable for the job, compared to how much was being paid to the French firm.

# THE HICCUPS

The *Nigerian System* did not disappoint, either in the infinite hope and exuberant aspiration it engenders in its very vibrant stock of humanity, or in faithfully and generously inflicting a lethal dose of frustration to crush dreams and ambitions of its most talented citizens. I was not spared. And I was no exception.
Eventually, *Nigeria happened to me*, did to me what it has done to generations of patriots before me ----- frustrate them, force them to return to wherever they were, and thereby unfortunately, deny herself the full benefits of leadership in cutting edge technology, which, it was my ambition to bestow her.
We must all try to make it work better.

"Cable title: NIGERIA: NOT ONLY GAS FLARES IN NIGERIA, ITS'
Tags: ASEC ECON EPET EINV DS DSS ITA IP AF OSAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 LAGOS 000148
SIPDIS
DEPT OF ENERGY FOR CAROLYN GAY
E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/08/2012

TAGS: ASEC ECON EPET EINV DS DSS ITA DS IP AF DS DSS OSAC
SUBJECT: NIGERIA: NOT ONLY GAS FLARES IN NIGERIA, ITS'

PETROLEUM HEADQUARTERS BUILDING ALSO BURNS

REF: STATE 241213Z

Classified By: CONSUL GENERAL ROBYN HINSON-JONES. REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D).

1. (C) Summary: Arson is strongly suspected in the December 24 fire that destroyed the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) headquarters and records. The fire followed by barely a week a newspaper article asserting that there is solid, extensive and documented proof that GON officials have been stealing much of Nigeria's oil revenue. The leader of a previously unknown group, the Young Democratic Movement YDM claimed responsibility for the fire, citing "unhappiness with the GON" as the impetus. He and his attorney have since been arrested. The GON has announced there will be investigations, but observers do not expect anyone to be charged or punished as a result. End summary.

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WHAT HAPPENED
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2. (C) During the evening of December 24, fire gutted the NNPC's Lagos headquarters building, which was located on Ikoyi Island in Lagos. Deputy

Police Commissioner (DPC), Haruna John (Please protect accordingly.), told CG and Econoff that the fire began on the eighth floor, where the offices of the Nigerian Petroleum Investment Management Services (NAPIM) were located. NAPIM manages the GON's joint ventures with international oil companies (Shell, Mobil, Chevron, AGIP, Elf, and Texaco). A second fire later ignited on the second floor of the building, where the Pipelines and Products Marketing Company (PPMC) was housed. PPMC sells diesel fuel, gasoline, kerosene, aviation kerosene, and similar products. PPMC recently began importing fuel in response to a shortfall on the local market.

3. (C) Observers noted the slow response of the fire department to the fire. The fire fighters who arrived first at the scene did so at least an hour after the blaze had started. According to the DPC, firemen initially refused to respond to the blaze until he personally dispatched policemen to the fire stations with orders to arrest firemen who refused to go. When the firemen eventually arrived on site, they lacked the proper equipment and had to wait for a water tanker. Hours later, a second blaze started on the second floor, six floors down from the first fire, and consumed the rest of the building.

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WHY HERE AND WHY NOW?
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4. (U) On December 17, 2002, Barth Obi Oyibo Thompson of Abia State placed a three-page statement in the "Vanguard", a widely read Lagos-based newspaper. He began the article by establishing his ties to President Obasanjo and Andrew Young among others, and his credentials as a petroleum industry expert. Claiming a commitment to Nigeria and to President Olusegun Obasanjo, Thompson wrote that he was compelled to expose ongoing fraud and theft of Nigeria's petroleum revenue through under-reporting of exports.

5. (U) Oyibo Thompson purported to have at least fifteen years of documentary history on Nigeria's oil exports and stated that he had extensive supportive data to prove his claim of fraud. He went on that it has been an open secret for some time that "an unidentified West African country" has been under-reporting its oil exports. According to Thompson, this fact allegedly explains why the World Bank reports that less than 45% of Nigeria's oil export proceeds end up funding Nigeria's federal budget. Oyibo Thompson concluded his accusation by calling on President Obasanjo, whom he considers an

honourable man, to identify the culprits and resolve the problem.

6. (C) Comment. Post has learned from Chuka Odom, Deputy Chief of Staff for Abia State (Please protect accordingly), that "Barth Obi Oyibo Thompson" is probably an alias. Our contact has not been able to locate anyone in Abia State who knows this Oyibo Thompson but, he surmised that "Thompson" was a senior NNPC official or a disgruntled employee who definitely had access to information. Our man further speculated that "Thompson" probably did not work alone, and that other persons inside NNPC were feeding him information. The reference to Obasanjo as an "honorable man" may be a subtle hint to the President to "do the right thing," our source said. End comment.

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WHO DID IT

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7. (U) Chris Nwozobia, leader of the previously unknown Youth Democratic Movement (YDM), has claimed responsibility for the fire. He reportedly said he set the building afire because of "unhappiness with the performance of the Federal Government". Nwozobia told the media that his group, based in

Lagos, has members throughout the country. Nwozobia turned himself over to State Security headquarters. Nwozobia and his attorney, Festus Keyamo, were later arrested.

8. (C) The Deputy Police Commissioner told us on January 8 that it is unlikely that the YDM had a direct hand in the fire. If it was involved at all, it was probably at the instigation of some person or group in an effort to cover up unethical practices at NNPC. He asserted that it would not have been unusual for such a group to be hired by a third party for such an act.

9. (U) Many observers think the fire was an inside job by persons interested in covering their tracks following wrongdoing. The fire began on the eighth floor, where important documents relating to GON investments were kept including joint venture contracts and production sharing agreements which may yield billions of dollars in revenue to the GON. The projects cover pipelines, oil field services, supply production facilities, and field development.

10. (U) Among the documents on this floor were those relating to cash calls. The GON recently paid 24 billion naira (approximately 240 million USD) in cash call arrears dating to the Abacha years (1994-99). The oil companies and the GON disagree on the

exact amount of the U.S. dollars owed for that period. The GON says it owes the international oil companies 300 million USD, the companies say 500 million USD.

11. (U) Documents relating to the daily sale of petroleum products were located on the second floor where fire also broke out. Since the NNPC's consignees typically obtain 30-day credit from the company, some of the documents that burned may have been essential to a determination of the exact amount owed to the NNPC. Current data on fuel imported or refined locally was also lost.

12. (C) On January 13 Econoff met with Chuka Odom, Chief of Staff of the Governor of Abia State, who opined that the government will most probably never determine the cause of the blaze. Odom pointed out that ninety percent of Nigeria's foreign revenue derives from the oil sector, yet this is the only sector without a cabinet ministry. Odom asserted that almost any senior GON official now has unrestricted, and possibly undocumented, access to NNPC records.

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LIKELY OUTCOME

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13. (C) The Deputy Police Commissioner said a police panel comprising as many as fifteen persons is investigating the matter, but he expects no significant findings. According to him, senior officials are not interested in the truth. Although asked to be a member of the investigative panel, the DPC said he refused to join, fearing reprisals if the investigation were done correctly and preferring not to be involved if it were botched. "It would be politically and professionally foolhardy," he said, " to uncover and expose the perpetrator if that person is moneyed or high-powered. This could result in death to the person who reveals the wrongdoing."

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WHAT NOW NNPC

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14. (U) The GON was not the only loser as a result of the inferno. The headquarters' 200 employees found themselves potentially jobless on Christmas Day. NNPC office workers are temporarily housed at the headquarters' guest quarters but some employees, such as domestics, are now unemployed. Because of crime in Lagos, many NNPC employees kept passports, school certificates, money and jewellery at their offices and will find it difficult to replace these items.

15. (U) An AmCit oil company executive told ConGen that the oil companies have copies of documents pertinent to their businesses at their offices in Nigerian and abroad at their corporate headquarters. NNPC should have copies of these documents in their Abuja offices, however, NNPC will most likely look to the oil companies to fill in the gaps.

16. (C) Comment. NNPC may have suffered a blow to its reputation, which was not high in any event. Many people suspect the authorities will never disclose the real cause of the fire. Lagos has a long history of unsolved fires gutting government properties. For example, the Defence Building burnt in 1991 during a probe of its activities. Nigeria External Telecommunications (NET) building burnt twenty years ago as the result of a fire in the accounts department. Its reconstruction has been in progress for as many years. Odua, an investment group comprising five southwestern states, has lost two of their buildings to fires in the last seven years. The skeptics say that NNPC will continue to conduct business as usual, even if from temporary quarters, and the memory of the fire and destroyed records will fade. Long-time Lagos residents say the various investigating panels will produce reports, but these will never be released to the public. Panel members might legitimately fear for their personal safety if they were to delve too deeply into the circumstances

> of what really happened on Christmas eve. HINSON-JONES".

For those unfamiliar with Intelligence and Reporting Formats, the above may seem like gibberish. No, it is not. Actually, it is a Confidential US Intelligence Cable (03LAGOS148) under cover of Wikileaks, from the US Consulate in Lagos, Nigeria, on 17th January 2003 (2003-01-17). The Time stamp is 16:13:00 (or thirteen minutes past four in the evening). It is an Intelligence report of what NNPC officials did following a three-page publication I, "*Barth Obi Oyibo Thompson*" placed on Vanguard News Paper on December 17, 2002, exposing the magnitude of crude oil being stollen from Nigeria. I took the extremely dangerous step of going public because the issue was suppressed by NNPC lobbyists at the National Assembly even after I had given it to the then Deputy Speaker, Hon. Chibudom Nwuche. I had earlier made a confidential report to President Obasanjo with weeks of his being sworn into office in 1999".

The above story has a long history. As early as 1992, I had built and established a technique to enable the Federal Government of Nigeria to track every drop of crude oil shipped out the territorial waters of Nigeria. The Minister of Petroleum then was non-other than, one of the most honest and patriotic citizens, Dr. (Rt. the Hon.) Chu Okongwu. Chu was shocked when he saw the credible evidence I presented, of the crime being committed against Nigerians, by a few individuals, in collaboration with their powerful international partners. He took it straight to President Babangida, who asked that it be presented for *Council Meeting,*

and before the AFRC, *Armed Forces Ruling Council*. All necessary network was in place, *including lease of satellite circuits* --- something almost no one, except NITEL, knew anything about then. Then political crisis exploded in the country, and Babangida "stepped aside". His Excellency, Chief Ernest Shonekan, immediately after he became Head of an Interim Government, was briefed of the Project, by his Senior Special Assistant and Minister for National Planning, Isaac Aluko-Olokun. I met once with the Head of the Interim National Government, who gave an anticipatory approval, and asked that I start work immediately. He also directed that a letter be officially written to Work Systems & Procedures Ltd, to that effect. Then, Abacha struck and took over. Things changed. The next thing I heard was that an entity, known as *Chougory and Chougory,* had been asked to take over the Project. I went to Court. A panel headed by Ephraim Akpata, JSC, found in my favour, but Abacha's regime refused to pay, until Obasanjo eventually inherited the matter. That is the background to President Obasanjo being briefed of it when he took over.

I laughed my head off when Nigerians seemed shocked by Peter Obi's accusations in 2022, to the effect that the NNPC and FGN officials were stealing billions of dollars every year from Nigerians ---- twenty years after I had reported the theft and made it public in 2003, as reported in the above confidential cable sent by US Consulate, Lagos ---- twenty years after *Wikileaks* had intercepted US Consulate Intelligence my report on my publication and made it public! A public statement exposing such staggering magnitude of fraud against Nigeria was of no interest

to Nigerian journalists. I think it exposed the sad lack of commitment to public interest by Nigerian journalists.

Before then, I had set up a *Price Intelligence Data* Base for FGN at the Federal Ministry of National Planning. It was never used. When President Obasanjo came to power and sought technical assistance from the World Bank to curb corruption in 2000, he was referred to the Project. I was resting from total exhaustion inflicted on me by Nigeria in my home in Roswell, a neighbourhood Atlanta, when I got a call about 4.00 am Atlanta time. It was from Nigeria. A lady introduced herself as Bose Ogunmuyiwa, Special Assistant to President Obasanjo. She told me that she was given my number by one Ogbuehi, then a Permanent Secretary at the Presidency, following instructions by the President that I be contacted over the Price Intelligence Data Base project that I had initiated a decade earlier. I understand that the scandalous cost of Abuja Stadium opened eyes to the need for such a scientific approach to project costing. Ironically, nothing was done. I asked for, and was paid, my humble consultation fee.

**"Nigeria: The National Internet Gateway of Controversy**

1 JANUARY 2008

***This Day (Lagos)***

INTERVIEW *By Roland Ogbonnaya*
Lagos — Naturally a very warm person, but on the day of this interview one could feel the bitterness and the feeling of betrayal

in his voice.
Any one in his shoes will feel the same. He was successful professional in the United States of America when a call from the home government encouraged Nigerians in the Diaspora to come and invest back home and help move the country to the next level".

**"The Guardian**

05 November 2019.
**Legal fireworks as court freezes FG, CBN accounts over N103.5 billion judgement debt**
By **Joseph Onyekwere , Chijioke Nelson and Bertram Nwannekanma**

*A Federal High Court, Umuahia has issued a global freezing order, directing the attachment of monies due to the Federal Government (FG) and the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) to satisfy $285.1million (N103.5 billion) judgement debt in favour of a firm. The decision followed an ex parte motion filed by Interstella Communications Limited and Obi Barth Thompson, praying the court for same in 10 reliefs against the FG and CBN……"*

The above two publication in Nigerian newspapers are about my struggles with the Nigerian State. Even then, I emphatically state that whatever my tribulations may have been at any time, there was always someone, a fellow Nigerian, who was committed to the cause of Justice, even within the very institution of Nigerian

State I was fighting. In the case of Interstella Communications Ltd and Obi Thompson versus the FGN, men like Chief Cornelius Adebayo, then Hon Minister of Communications, and Alhaji Ahmed Yola, then Solicitor General of the Federation, were such men. They are no more in Service, but it was their stance that made a difference. They tried to distinguish right from wrong, even when they had the power to do otherwise.

# BACKGROUND FACTS

The Judgment arose the breach of a commercial network *inter-connectivity* agreement Interstella entered with the Nigerian Telecommunications Limited, NITEL, a competing commercial enterprise owned by the Federal Government of Nigeria, who, beyond the breach, also wilfully destroyed Interstella's investment in Nigeria. It was, by 2003, the most advanced communications network ever conceived or built anywhere, and in some specific ways, even to-date.

Before WhatsApp, Interstella had created a platform for voice, video, and audio communications. *One World*: "a borderless, free national and international telephony platform" created by Interstella Communications in 2004. It was sabotaged by NCC and Galaxy Backbone, despite recommendations by the Office of NSA and the Federal Ministry of Science and Technology.

Until quite recently, the usual telephone set in a house or anywhere, known as POT (Plain Old Telephone), is connected to the PSTN (Public Switched Telephone Network) by the usual CAT 5 cable, which can only transmit voice through a narrow band. As a bridge, Interstella created a technology hybrid by using ATA (Analog Telephone Adapter) to connect the analogue POT to RJ 7 cable to enable the analogue telephone set to make VOIP calls (Voice Over the Internet). This was in 2003. By 2004, Interstella had its own *IP phones,* programmed to enable anyone

on the Internet make and receive calls, from anywhere to anywhere. NCC was so ignorant that it queried Interstella and threatened to impose sanctions if the platform was not taken down immediately. All these were at a time when the most advanced communication network in the world was *BlackBerry,* a service of *Research in Motion*, a Canadian telecommunications giant. But it was restricted to *BlackBerry*-to-BlackBerry handsets only; and it could only support text messages. Shamelessly, the major mobile telephony networks in Nigeria were marketing and promoting *BlackBerry* services, deceitfully pretending that it was part of their network offerings, while they were at the same time, colluding with NCC and NITEL, to subvert Interstella.

Long before Elon Musk's *Starlink* (now a global sensation in 2025!), was much earlier preceded by Interstella's submissions in 2005, to use NITCOMSAT 1 to connect every rural community in Nigeria to the global Internet. I remember the then Executive Vice Chairman of the NCC, Ernest Ndukwe, who, upon listening to concepts of Interstella presented before him for necessary support of the NCC, pejoratively saying that I remind him of *DeLorea*, the automobile industry genius, who designed a car by the same name, except that the car he (*DeLorea)* designed, was a science fiction phantom, an illusion. I hope Ernest Ndukwe now knows who was in grand delusion, and the cost Nigeria and Africa paid by being denied the credit of *inventing something,* because of individuals like him heading critical offices in institutions like NCC, at such decisive moments of history.

# GovNet

Every major country (government) in the world, has its private communications network for running its business without the use of the *public carrier's networks* and facilities. This is called *GovNet, Government Network,* in most countries. *GovNets* interconnect key agencies and officials of the governments nationwide and worldwide, so that they can communicate in a secured *intercom* mode across vast space and geographies. This includes intra agency, inter agency, and connection of the governments' diplomatic posts worldwide.

In the olden days (before the Information technology revolution), every government department had at least an analogy *intercom* mediated by internal wiring or radio links, inter-connecting all key staff of the department. In some countries, as was the case in Nigeria, this is further connected (through *leased circuit*) to the intercom of other agencies or departments, creating what was then called a *trunked intercom.* At that time, only very senior key government officials had access to such *trunked intercom* lines (so-called *hotline*). That way, the President or Head of a government had direct access to his key officers in every Ministry or department without the use of public networks.

Given that technology (switched telephony technology), only a few very rich countries could afford to extend such *hotline* connections beyond their borders to connect all their diplomatic

posts and vital installations across the world. This was because the cost of leasing adequate capacities in switched long distance circuits (*trunks*) was prohibitive. But even at that, the countries that could afford to do so realised that, despite the seemingly high initial infrastructural costs, the savings were enormous, when compared to paying monthly telephone bills for using the network of public telecom carriers. Beyond the low-cost benefit, it served the best interest of national security and Intelligence operations of a sovereign state by enabling *secure end-to-end* communications at designated points through installation of physical encryption and decryption devices at the origination and terminating points (the so-called *network keys*).

With the advent of Information Technology revolution, such switched private networks or intercom, are replaced by *digital software- mediated* closed telecommunications networks, called VPN (*Virtual Private Network*). Instead of switched circuits, source codes are used to create robust communication networks powered by *SIP, Session Initiation Protocol.* This is at an insignificant cost, compared to the cost of the infrastructures for leased circuit in the switched analogue private network era. Besides, through skilful implementation, it is extra territorially more secure. For example, a leased switched telephone line between Nigeria's diplomatic Mission in London and Nigeria inevitably had a section of it that is tethered to the physical infrastructures of a British network operator. It is no secret that communications passing through such physical points are prone to interception. This defect is considerably cured when communication is SIP mediated, due to its *non-physical fixed*

*points nature*. It is also much more robust and versatile. For example, under the old leased switched circuit point-to-point network routing, a Nigerian mission in London cannot have closed network communication with the Nigerian Mission in Bonn, Germany, without leasing another private circuit from London to Berlin. To connect Berlin to Oslo or Abuja would require different leased circuits; and this is replicated over and over again, as the number of connected points in a switched private network mesh increase. The cost is highly prohibitive; hence, only a few rich countries could afford such private networks in yesterday's communications technology. But with SIP, all connected end users anywhere are implemented on one local router and server in Nigeria. Nigerian diplomats anywhere can thus hold closed SIP communication without paying the prohibitive cost of leased circuits.

It is for the above reasons that the Federal Ministry of Science and Technology, through its agency (NITDA), signed an MoU with Interstella Communications Limited to build and operate such VPN (*Virtual Private Network)* interconnecting all designated officers of Federal Government Ministries and Agencies, as well as Nigeria's diplomatic Missions across the world, such that they can communicate in an intercom mode. The connected points include both homes and offices of key officers. Of course, it was not lost on local vested interests, and their agents within the government, that the huge savings in communications services worldwide, would come from a drastic reduction in the unnecessary sum's government pays every month to local carriers whose networks are used to make every

call between government offices and officers, even when they are in the same building! It must be stated that even the richest countries on this planet do not indulge in such obvious waste. *But this is Nigeria*, as the saying goes. To date, the MOU between Interstella and the FGN for such services is in a political *cull de sac.*

# LOOKING AT A BEAUTIFUL SUNSET, AND THE EFFULGENT MOON

Now that I have arrived at the *End Stage* of my long wandering through a *time landscape* whose dominant features (and my permanent companions) were loneliness, anxieties, worries, and restlessness that obsessed and nearly drove me nuts, is over;

Now that the mythical *Tomorrow* (a seemingly endless hunger for when I would feel that I have touched what often seemed like an unrealistic imaginary horizon), is *Here* as *My Today*;

Now that my *Now and Here,* is the destination of an incredibly costly journey through unmarked paths, a seeming reckless undertaking that did not disappoint in delivering its threat and promise of a series of irreparable direct and collateral brutal injuries and damages that stretched and challenged the human threshold for enduring pains with grace, even when sometimes with tears;

Now that ultimately, I have seen that legendry *Eldorado,* and I can clearly see where and how a lifetime chase after a seemingly illusory dream of touching the Rainbow ends;

Now that the *Here and Now, Where, How*, and *When* ---- all seems frozen as one Comic entity; it is natural that at age 80, I am

undergoing an introspection, a soliloquy with my being, a self-interrogation of my Soul over my Life.

At the end, *what does that seemingly maverick, and sometimes mercurial entity, called Oyibo, think, now that his God has granted him all he wished?*

I am very proud of myself, and grateful for the divine gift and blessing of having the courage for doing whatever had to do within the law to get me out of *There* and bring me to *Here and Now*. I say with humility and frankness, that I have no regrets, and no apology to myself, for the brutal bruises I had to sustain in pursuits of my objectives within the constraints of resources available to me. I would not have had it any other way. Certainly, along my paths, across various unmarked hostile and thorny landscapes of different territories, through different inclement seasons from here and then to here and now, there are or were, those who may allege that I offended them in one way or the other or hurt by my behaviour at critical and decisive moments of my life. All I can say with all frankness and sincerity is that it was not my intention to offend or hurt anyone. It is also a fact that often, humans are biased by self-interest which limits their capacity for objectivity so much so that they cannot really avoid inserting their best interest in passing judgment on the behaviour of others. Even then, I had a conscience, an aboriginal moral compass outfitted and installed in me by my mother, who I believe is the greatest guest that the Earth is ever honoured to host. Hence, though pursuant to my self-interest I will do all I can to dismantle whatever obstacle that may be on my way, I will still

do my very best to consider the interest others whenever my conscience warns or alerts me of a need to do so, otherwise my only obligation is to not break or breach the laws of the land. I am also ever mindful of the fact that there are *spiritual laws*, which may not be stated or promulgated in the civil and penal statutes of any country. I think the Irish Reverend Fathers did a great job by inculcating early in me, during my pre-teen years, a terrifying image of *a no-none-sense vengeful God*. Of course, I was a *Mass Server* at age ten by no other virtue than that I could recite the Latin responses like a parrot, with understanding whatsoever of what they meant or implied!

I have just told the Story of my life so far. I do so primarily to inspire and guide those whose *Today* was my *Yesterday*.

However, I must warn and caution the reader that I am not a perfect man; and certainly, I am not a model. Rather, it suffices to say that *My Story, The Life of Emesieobi (Obi) Oyibo Bartholomew Thompson*, is a patchwork of improvisations and borrowing. I am the proverbial weaver bird, whose nest is made of straws from different lands. My life story a quilt or tapestry of different textures, woven into a fine fabric, wrapped in a kaleidoscope by an Invisible Hand. This *Invisible Hand* is the araldite and glue that held otherwise mutually repulsive minute granular grains of ash and dust together, through seasons of ferocious storms and violent outbreaks of wildfires in different under different climates and extreme temperatures conditions that froze hell-over and melted the Artic snow. Anyone who wears a garment made from a cut from this fabric, must humbly and

gratefully honour the Invisible Hand that weaved the fabric, no matter what the fad of faith of his or her day may be. I must confess that I am in awe as I realise that for my lineage and ancestry, I am in the same position at this *Moment*, as other patriarchs of history who directed their lineage and descendants on the path to follow, *Who*, *What, and How* to worship, given the lessons they learned during their time on Earth. It is indeed a dreadful duty to project my experiences as a guide for a future, of which, I have no idea whatsoever. I realise that I do not know anything about my descendants and other people of different generations who will read this. But they will know all about me ---- and gleefully, in the comport I paid for with my sweat and tears, pass verdict of how and where they will think I failed, and what they may see as my victories. I realise, almost with trepidation, that I write this (in the year 2025 AD) for people who will live under circumstances of which I have no clue ---- people who will live even 500 years or more in the future, even though, today, I can see tomorrow only through a glass darkly.

But despite these limitations, and despite my innumerable imperfections and perhaps avoidable mistakes, it was my Faith that brought me *Here*. This is my Sacred Secret. It is also the greatest asset, Inheritance, or Legacy, that I bequest my descendants. Hence, I must write this. I have the right and duty to do so, to direct my descendants on how to follow and walk along the trails I created and left for them. Implicit in the above, is that anyone inheriting anything from me understands that by so doing, he or she is enjoined to a Creed or Covenant. It has to be so, in order for them to avoid the mistakes I made; and set

them on a life quest with superior and supreme purpose, far beyond and above mine -- a quest that will enable them spend their limited days on this Planet striving for a Life Essence that is beyond Time, Space and Self, but in their best interest and particularly the best interest of humanity--- beyond the ephemeral fad prevailing for each generation. After all, Christianity is over 2000 years old. But its basic dogmas stand almost unchanged, from what a few people decided at the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D., as its creed.

Through godless pain, sweat and tears, I think I have laid a solid foundation. Nobody has any right, moral or legal, to challenge or change the architectural design of the building I erected therefrom. Of course, Time may call for refurbishing. But this must be done without distorting either the foundation or the basic structure. Above all, I hope that anyone who reads this comes to understand the *Mystery and Power of Faith,* especially those I target as my primary audience --- those whose *Today* was my Y*esterday*, those who it is my esteemed desire to inspire and give hope, and perhaps guide, even in dire and desperate circumstances as indeed mine was.

With the benefit of hindsight, I now see that deep at the core of my personality, was rebellion against my circumstances, sometimes rebelling against myself, which my peers in Umuajata where I spent the early days of my life, are familiar with. That was what fuelled my actions, even when in the exterior, it seemed I was acting out of my characteristic audacity, incredible self-confidence, and sometimes suicidal courage. It was a teenager’s

*Cry for Help.* But no one heard, or they pretended to be deaf. But I was too scared to quit, to give-up, or stop trying. No options other than my goals were acceptable.

My life story validates that each human being is a particle of God, a beam of light that can forever banish all darkness, blemishes and shortcomings of the extant human condition, for any Age in Time and Space, depending on the intentions and actions chosen by the torch holder. It is true that Man *"is a house and architect, performer and spectator, all in one;(and) armed "only with his innate and inherent Nature,"* he has all he needs *to "hack and quarry his desired goal to arrive, his prayers having already been granted by Heaven…"*

Bearing this in mind, I dare say that each individual has the power to achieve whatever goals he sets for himself; and that Life is a very blissfully happy journey. It can be fantastically "successful" (whatever that may mean to any individual, depending on the Time he or she lives), even as Life may also, like Shylock, inflict remarkable bruises as a price It exacts to avail individual whatever he or she sets Life Goals.

The Christian doctrine is that God became Man and took flesh. I hope the *Angelus* has not changed, as everything is wont to, these days. However, it is not only Jesus Christ that was given this incredibly amazing blessing. Each of us is. It is very transformative, even as it is almost impossible to grasp, but rather to ponder over, the idea that God, out of unimaginable love for mankind, subordinated Itself by choosing to live in us, in order to

understand the human condition. God is formless. It exists in us, just as an invisible membrane separates one cell of the *same body* from the other. This is what the Christian Church means by calling its congregations all over the world "One Body". But it is not limited to the adherents of a particular sect or spiritual cult. The entirety of humanity is "One Body", in which God lives and manifests Itself in the unique identities each person, among billions of individuals on the Planet at any Time. It is the case then that God is continuously adjusting the Universe, to accommodate human behaviour, whims and caprices. We now know that the Universe is infinite, not fixed or limited in space-time. It is ever expanding. How? We once believed that there is a sum total of energy in the Universe. The question then arises as to where the energy for the infinite expansion is coming from. Of course, Dark Matter and Dark Energy are given credit for these observed phenomena, except that Black Holes are there to suck up everything, including light and gravity. However, in all these stretches of human intellect, we have excluded the ever-self-multiplying energy source --- our individual Thoughts and Actions. Man is yet to understand that he is a critical energy source for the Universe. Our thoughts and activities create energy. This is what neither Einstein nor the Oslo School of Quantum field Physics has yet realised; nor has the *Planck theorists*. But the fact is that by the agency of *the God in Man*, forces in the Universe are being constantly adjusted and re-distributed, towards better cosmic evolutions, beyond our present ability to detect. And God is constantly adjusting things in the Universe in a way that accommodatingly responds to the wishes, actions, and prayers of each human being. Therefore, each human

has the power to affect the dynamics of the Universe and set Existence on a different spiritual and socio-economic trajectory. This is consistent with Judeo-Christian belief of a *Benevolent God*. The obvious implication of this core belief is that we have the power to choose our Destiny. This is inherent in the Truth, which states that God made Man in His image and likeness; and also gave Man free will… the right to make choices of actions and responses in any given situation or circumstance.

I believe that given the presence of God in Man, each one of us can influence how society and human civilization evolve. To understand this Doctrine, it is important to dig deep into my *Root.*

The Doctrine contents are based on The Power of Faith. It binds us to accept that by our wilful action, we can assert and claim our *Manifest Destiny* to be the harbingers of a New World Order for Mankind anywhere, and everywhere on this Planet; and to change our notion of human worth, particularly as predicated on the prevailing (21st Century) materially defined concept of wealth, power, success and failure.

# My Contribution to Science and Human Intellectual Capacity

Sadly, Africans have accepted a self-diminution status of educated apes, incapable of making scientific breakthroughs, but who rather shamelessly brandish as their intellectual achievements and self-validation, certifications issued to them in attestation of their having loyally and faithfully consumed Western intellectual scientific thoughts and theories without discernment. Consequently, they are the first to rise up in arms against any profound original scientific theory and hypotheses formed by an African against the grains of what they have been brainwashed to believe. They behave as if questioning the doctrines spoon-fed to them by White Masters is a threat to their status and in the eyes of Western 'civilization'. This is tragic and pathetic.

However, anyone that has sat in a classroom with me in Europe, America or anywhere knows that what always stood me out was not my exceptional brilliance, but rather what was labelled as my 'stubborn' refusal to swallow any theory, mathematical equation, law of physics, chemical formular, etc. until and unless I know it is either true (to me), or something that makes sense.

Ipse dixit just doesn't fly in my airspace. I am understandably

baffled and embarrassed by the fact that intellectuals and scholars of African ancestry simply do not have the capacity and self-confidence to assert their aboriginal or native scientific thoughts and theories beyond precogitations like parrots, of their masters' theories. Consequently, profound scientific theories proposed to humanity by our ancestors are snubbed and arrogantly discarded by mere waive of hand.

# MgbeMgbe, My Theory and Concept of the Beginning of Time

In my book, Centuries of Igbo Civilization, I propounded the recalibration of Cosmic Time in the light of cutting-edge scientific theories such as Quantum Field theory, Schwinger Effect, and Higgs Field theory. This is in affirmation and validation of the Cosmology of the Universe as expressed by our ancestors millennia ago; and aligning it with the latest principles and theories of Physics.

MgbeMgbe (as it is referred to in ancient Igbo Cosmology and folklore millennia ago) theoretically asserts that beyond what modern theoretical physics describes, Time exists as a dimension of its own and existed before the beginning of our Universe. Modern Multiverse hypothesis, Quantum gravity theories, Cyclic Universes theories, Imaginary time, etc. are evoked simply to duck allegations of Deism, in allegiance and fidelity to an oath sworn by immediate post Dark Age Europeans to abnegate any doctrine that is not empirically verifiable. But Mathematics itself is a cult code language. It has no validity or existence elsewhere beyond the mind of those who ascribe to it as a deity. There are other forms of intellectual expression and description of phenomena that existed before humans developed the cult code

or language called Western mathematical formalism and banished anything else.

According to Igbo Cosmology, Mgbe Mgbe is the most ancient ancestry to all hierarchies of cosmic Times. It exists as a continuum connecting this instant moment to eternity, beyond the beginning of our Universe. It is the orchestrator of all fundamental forces and phenomena in the Cosmos. Western Sciences have imposed an artificial boundary and religious doctrines such that any Existence beyond the Cosmic Microwave Background Radiation (CMBR) event edge is denied. But there was Something, a precedence that triggered the birth of the Universe event, before the release of the CMBR. The CMBR itself is only detectable within the microwave spectrum of Electromagnetic Spectrum, EMS. The Cosmic Microwave Background Radiation was released in the early universe much later, after the EMS. Indeed, the EMS was entrained in whatever caused the birth of our Universe. Quantum gravity theory hints of the existence of some unknown energy frequency before the birth of the universe. Hence, Time did not begin 13. 8 billion years ago. There is Mgbe Mgbe, an energy frequency that connects the Present to the mythical Origin of Origins, as the ancient Igbo narrated in their folklores and theory of evolution of the Universe. It is beyond the esoterics of Western theoretical physics and mathematics.

In their theory of the evolution of the universe, the Igbo Ancients believed that there is pre-existing dimension or hierarchy within

the cosmos that operates as a mechanism or entity that determines the beginning and end of a cosmic cycle, beyond human perception. They called such entity MgbeMgbe, --- the Ultimate Mastermind of the Cosmos, the Master-Timer and Regulator, the Arbitrator and Orchestrator that triggers cosmic cycles and phenomena. It is the Soul of the Universe, inaccessible to human intellect and consciousness. It is infinite, beyond Beginnings and Endings (of Cosmic Cycles). Hence, there is no human language that can specifically identify it, except in a limited self-referential simile, MgbeMgbe, as the Ancient Igbo philosophers deduced. MgbeMgbe is like identifying a man as John John, where John is a contemporal John, the different generations of One immutable John, finitely self-replicating. There is nothing (no membrane) separating one John from any John; or between John and John. Every John is John in every respect, except that some Johns are in different Cosmic zones, including the domain of human perception. The mere thinking or exploration of this idea or concept is of profound, far-reaching and monumental impact, beyond our present knowledge in various fields such as Cosmology, Theoretical Physics, and Philosophy. It simply threatens a set-aside of instant theories; and inescapably imposes a need for totally new concepts, theories, logic and mathematics, to help explain it. We may think of it like the various frequencies operating at different bands, but all within the same EMS, manifested in different levels of the CMBR or Cosmic Zones connecting the Present to the Big Bang and beyond.

Within the above scheme, the immutable MgbeMgbe self-segments, and devolves as Mgbe and other hierarchies of intervals between different Event Horizons during the lifetime of a universe, or events at the Edge of Space (or during an epoch) --- be they the intervals between births and deaths of celestial bodies like meteorites, asteroids, etc --- and all the continuum of intervals or durations, down to minutest micro fractions of a nanosecond.

In Igbo Folklore, Mgbe is the interval encompassing events anywhere in the Universe from the 'Beginning' of the Universe to its edge, and perhaps, beyond. Hence, every Igbo Folklore begins with:

Ororu otu Mgbe (Narrator), Otu Mgbe eru / Otu Mgbe ebido /Otu Mgbe erugharie /Otu Mgbe erugherie (Response of listeners), meaning: Once upon a Time (Narrator); Time was there / Time started/Time evolved/Time begot Time/Time becomes Time/ Time transforms Itself to Time (Response of listeners).

The Igbo Proposal: Ororu Otu Mgbe, Otu Mgbe eru / Otu Mgbe ebido /Otu Mgbe erugharie / Otu Mgbe erugherie can be expressed as a simple algebraic equation, where time is self-contained and unchanging, such that the output (t) is equal to the input (t). Time Equals Time

$$t = t.$$

The Proposal (that time is a self- transforming dynamic entity which self-evolves, such that the output ($t_2$) is a function (f) of the input ($t_1$) can also be expressed thus:

$$t_2=f(t_1).$$

The Proposal implies that Mgbe, or an Epoch, is cyclic or self-transforming, mirroring MgbeMgbe. Implicit in the Cyclic or Self- transforming Mgbe/Time, is an Eternal Return of an infinite series of cycles in a way that each cycle repeats the same events and patterns a trap of eternity, where nothing is allowed to go any other way, than as pre-determined. This is understandable given the relationship between MgbeMgbe and Mgbe, such that Mgbe is a manifestation and replica of a self-simulating MgbeMgbe. Within this framework, the essence of energy during any given cycle remains constant, while the transformations and manifestations are as necessary for orchestrations of phenomena during the cycle. Mgbe would be the prime-mover and orchestrator of all dynamics in the Universe during a given Cycle. Indeed, a cyclic or self-transforming Time takes away our egocentric idea of free will, such that Man is constrained to do whatever he wants, in a universe of diverse and very robust options, but within unknown and unknowable limits of what MgbeMgbe permits within a given Mgbe. In short, the psychological backbone and under-pinning of Western philosophy and psychology of free-will and extreme individualism, would simply collapse ---- as indeed it has no place in Nature.

Mgbe is a cosmic muppetier with options to behave, if it please, like a gravitational field that can pull events to flow in any direction -- either towards, or away from it, not strictly in any one arbitrary direction, but within the permissible or the permitted. This changes our present definition of the speed at which a phenomenon travels through free space, to the pace at which a phenomenon changes its location relative to other objects in space. If objects move relative to time, it could suggest that time could be navigated or traversed in some way, allowing for time travel. It also disrupts our theories of causal relationships between events and thereby imposes challenges like creation of closed time-like curves where Time is a constant.

In the Ancient Igbo Cosmology, the duration and end of a phenomenon is divided into eleven units for proper identification. These are: MgbeMgbe and Mgbe as already defined.

Mgbe, like MgbeMgbe is an infinite Time either in the past (Mgbe garaaga) or the future (Mgbe di n'ihu) subject to the discretion of MgbeMgbe. Eyiere or Eyie is the Igbo word for events or phenomena that occur in cycles, seasons, or trends. Oge is a count of a particular cycle, season or number of repetitions of a particular event or phenomenon. Afo(year), Onwa (month) Izu (week), Ubochi (day), Elekere (hour), Elekere anya (minutes) and Ntabianya na (seconds, the time it takes to blink). In Igbo calendar, there are four days in Izu, week: Afor, Orie, Nkwo, and Eke. A day is divided into three: Ututu, Ehihie /Owu, and

Abali(Morning, Afternoon and Nightfall. The day starts with Owuwa Anyanwu (Sun rise) and ends with Odida Anyanwu (Sunset).

All the above pose challenges for Physics and Cosmology requiring a modern scientific framework, purpose-built and ancillary to exploring the implications of Ancient Igbo Cosmology of the Existence of different hierarchies of Time, such as Mgbe, MgbeMgbe, etc.

The Igbo Folklore narrative: Oruru Otu Mgbe,

Otu Mgbe eru / Otu Mgbe ebido / Otu Mgbe erugharie / Otu Mgbe erugherieh as the prospects of a deeper understanding of the Universe and its underlying structure.

People of African descent all over the world will remain underdogs as long as we continue aping our colonial masters in every field of human civilization. The above is my attempt at intellectual jailbreak in agitation for the renaissance of our ancient civilization derogated and destroyed by our colonial masters. It is a call for intellectual wakeup.

# LESSONS LEARNED, CONCLUSIONS, AND LEGACY

What I have learned about myself is that I am not one of those whose wisdom developed so early in life that almost every step they take or took is masterfully planned and executed in such an orderly logical sequence that the outcome of each action is a linear progression sometimes so predictable that the outcome is known even before the action. I have always stood in awe and watched with great admiration and respect as such individuals take or took every step of their life journey with amazing discipline, grace, carefulness, thoroughness, diligence and caution. That, in and by itself, is a great blessing, and perhaps, a life purpose. Through such people, the Universe has enfolded and revealed to us one of its inherent organizing principles. Enthalpy and entropy are two fundamental concepts that can help us understand the inherent organizing properties of the Universe. Enthalpy is the energy that holds different components of a whole together. It may also be thought of as the fractals of Lego bricks that determine the various geometric shapes that can be assembled from the seemingly different bricks of the Lego no matter how the bricks are scattered to confuse the mind. On the order hand is Entropy. It is a measure of the chaotic, disorderly and randomness of bewildering behaviours a system or individual may exhibit. The two seemingly opposing forces reside harmoniously in Mother Nature, none seeking to undue the other.

The relationship between enthalpy and entropy can help us understand the Universe's tendency to seek order. The individuals who tend to arrange themselves in a more ordered and structured way, are examples and templates of how self-organised life is. Those who scatter things and try to re-shape them to sooth and suit their temperament are also expressions and metaphor for the incredible diversities, options, challenges and opportunities Life presents, a clear demonstration that there is enough energy in the Universe for the individual to accomplish whatever he or she chooses in one lifetime journey.

In my case, I can say with certainty that all the Epoc breaking decisions of and action I took in my life were spontaneous and extemporaneous, taken on the spur of the moment, in response to whatever my raw native instincts dictate. The fact is that no rational or conventional model or framework for seeking my goals was appropriate in my circumstances. I had to create the cocktail that soothed my nerves before I gather my wits and hit and crack the next brick wall, a daredevilry chain that sometimes made an observable hold his or her breath in horror wondering when and how all these clear recklessness would end.

I don’t think my character evinced by this pattern of behaviours ever changed. I only changed my tactics and strategies or modus operandi immediate upon my becoming a father laced with the responsibility of providing all the material need for *a comfortable* family.

I have come to know that every human life is a *matrix of potentials* that are unique for that individual. Each of these potentials is a *Divine Purpose* for that individual life, just as the potentials of a *Quantum Force Field is Infinite*. Such potentials or *Cosmic Purposes* can forever remain dormant, if the individual does not make efforts to exploit and activate at least one of them. No circumstance, no matter how bleak, can stop an individual from achieving at least *Divine Purpose* for his or her life, provided the individual makes sufficient effort with Faith, believing that the *Purpose* itself is an *Unstoppable Life Force*, which no other Force can stop, once it is set in motion by *Effort*.

Though Science has shied away from research on subjects and issues that could ignite spiritual or socio-political controversies, it is my strong belief that a fetus or embryo in the mother's womb is connected to the Universe through an unknown frequency, as indeed there is a high probability of certain energy frequencies and wavelengths of Electromagnetic Spectrum that are still unknown. The Universe assigns a unique fingerprint identity encoded in the fetus while it is still in the mother's womb. This identity serves as a distinctive marker encoded onto the foetus DNA, allowing the Universe to recognize and track the individual throughout a lifetime journey. It is also the means or frequency through which the individual communicates with the Divine transcending spatial and temporal boundaries, and monitors the journey of each being, from conception to death, and beyond. The Christian Holy Book, the Bible, even evidenced this fact at

**Isaiah Chapter 49, verse 1**, where it puts it so:

> *The Lord has called me from the womb; and from the matrix of my mother, He has made mention of my name.*

From my experience, there is no force on Earth that can block or stop anyone when he or she finds and connects to the energy field or frequency, assigned to him or her by the Divine even from the mother's womb, to enable the individual to accomplish his or her Life Purpose. This is a spiritual fact subscribed and attested to by all faith communities. It is sometimes called *Will Power*. That is why we pray that God's will (for our life) be done. Both Jesus Christ prayed for same and were willing to be guided by it. Some people actually believe that no good can come their way, only because they do not have the material means to even try. It is a suicide of faith --- and indeed the gravest *spiritual sin* against God's purpose in your human life --- to be frustrated and defeated by any level of poverty or a lack of material support to the extent that you give up pursuing your divinely assigned life purpose.

The true essence of the "success" one attains in his Life Purpose is to use it to enable many more, to activate their own life potentials, so that the "success" does not stay dormant, but rather serves its essence – which is, to sustain *the indefinite continued progress of existence and events that occur, and keep occurring in an apparently irreversible succession, from the Past, through the Present, to the Future.* The Universe replenishes Its energy

through the *Life Purpose* assigned to each individual among us, *It* did not cheat anyone in the grand scope of things.

God's purpose in creating Man is that he lives a happy peaceful life. It is a gift. It is not to make anyone become a *materialistic monster,* or a demigod. To pervert and derogate material success by greedily coveting it, is a curse and a sin. You demean and depreciate your *Life Purpose,* when you hoard the material gifts you received to enable you fulfil *God's Purpose* for your life. Such material gift is meant for securing and sustaining your needs for comfortable life and serving as a launching pad for others to pursue their own purpose, and thereby *fertilize the Earth*, by helping other lives to achieve their own purposes, so that hunger, disease, hatred, envy, sadness, destitution and other derogations, alien to *Divine Purpose,* are defeated. Each and every one of us is not permitted to act in any other way than to fight the above deviations from the purpose for the gift of life given to each of us.

True wealth and power are the extent one helps in fighting these aliens that could have destroyed a life as mine *Yesterday;* and could easily have made my *Today* impossible, but for Divine intervention of giving me Faith, as my greatest asset in this life, that enabled me to pursue my P*urpose*. I am also aware that even this too, would have been frustrated, if I did not have a mother as mine, who strove to provide me the barest basics, without which it is impossible to dream, have hope and faith, and then try to strive to thrive.

My wealth, and the wealth of whoever benefits from it, cannot be for any other purpose than to use it to irrigate the arid desert of abject poverty, in which millions are trapped, so that they too do not wither and die, as grasses due to lack of water. We must, as a matter of duty, give the gift of life to millions. It is the greatest wealth of all, and the greatest way to humbly worship and praise God. It is the greatest assurance for a continued unbroken chain of Divine Blessing, prosperity and power abiding for eternity, in the clan of the '*The Candle and The Wind*'s' bloodline.

In my life, there has been an *Ever Bright and Unblinking Beacon of Invisible Light* (call It God, a Spirit, or whatever you want), that guides me, an unskilled sailor with absolutely zero sea-faring skill, equipped with only with an improvised rudderless raft, to embark on a voyage through many tempestuous deep and dark stormy high seas, and it brought me *Here*, the safest harbour!. It is that *Ever Bright and Unblinking Beacon of Invisible Light* that gave me the inspiration or ambition, a troubling restlessness of the spirit, that never gave up or abandoned me, even in my most desperate and seemingly helpless moments; and the raw courage to keep my eyes on the ball and nothing else, no matter how dark the day may be, no matter how damning the odds. It was there to guard and guide me, when I embarked on a risky adventure through a pathless treacherous and perilous wilderness.

Along the way, I made several mistakes of the mind, as all humans do. But even then, my faith in *Divine Compassion and Understanding* sustained my hope, and my vision of reaching a

*Promised Land* that existed only vaguely in my imagination. And it brought me Here. It is that *Invisible Power* that I serve and worship. And it is to Its Glory, that I do whatever I can, for humanity. Whatever I do with my life, is a Prayer that such acts stand as an Eternal Monument, a Timeless Evidential Testimony, of what the power and grace of God can do: Out of mere ash, It can build eternal towers touching the sky, even without a foundation, to commemorate Its glory. *Yes, and here, I stand as Proof.*

Accordingly, I assert that the aim of our education should be to equip us with the necessary tools: moral, intellectual, and material, that will enable us to be the *Responsible Authority,* for the state of the world and condition of mankind everywhere. Our intellectual achievement should not aim at being the most renowned of any profession. We should not be obsessed with being the most famous legal expert. Rather, we should strive for, as an ambition, the number of people we help to obtain justice and equity through the legal system, by paying for them to assert their God given right for *Fair Treatment Under the Law*; and without fear of how powerful the oppressor(s) may be.

We must always bear in mind that it is not as important to be the best engineer or architect known to history, as being the ones who, silently provide a decent living space and environment, for people who would otherwise die, in the squalor of socio-economic ghettos around the world.

Wealth is not evidenced by the size of the mansion we live in, but by the number of people we rescue from being homeless, suffering the indignity of street life. Our wealth is measured, not by how much money we have in our bank accounts around the world, nor our vast real estate possessions and title deeds, our private jets and luxurious cars; but by the number of people, we educate, feed, house, cloth, empower, and give hope and faith.

It is not important to be called a "good church member", but it is our *Divine Duty*, and without judgment, to give hope, faith and self-confidence, and show kindness and love, to those who otherwise would give up and surrender to the stupor of powerlessness.

Power, for us, does not arise, nor lie, in the number of people we can intimate and trample upon with impunity, steal their rights and get away with it. Indeed, it lies in making sure that everyone obeys the law and can be held accountable for transgressions --- the same way his houseboys and servants are held; otherwise, he goes to prison and be treated like every other common criminal.

We have no religion other than struggling, albeit imperfectly, to be God-like in every circumstance, at any cost, including accepting our shortcoming and misdeeds, even when what we would have loved to be kept secret, is made public; and we feel humiliated and or betrayed.

We must aim at creating a world where courage to be different in a civil way, is celebrated over cowardly conformity.

We must be pragmatic and have faith in the innate goodness of our fellow man. Therefore, we must be fair in our dealings with all human beings, be they our neighbours or not. But never allow him, her, or them, to take us for granted. Let him, her, or them know, that you are a rattlesnake; give everyone sufficient warning against stepping on you. But when, despite that, he, she, or they dare you, *strike*.

Finally, I thank everyone and every event in my life, including those who may feel or have felt that in one way or the other, they were hurt and negatively impacted by my behaviours at any phase of my journey. They are all necessary experiences in one's lifetime. The Universe Itself is learning from us, humans, and constantly adjusting and balancing Its energies, towards better and higher evolutions. And each life, from birth to death, is also a journey and process of evolution, even as a microcosm.

# EPILOGUE

In the heart of a tempestuous night, a lone candle was lit.

As the Candle fickle flame tried its first steps of the innocent Dance of Youth

The winds howled like a chorus of restless spirits, threatening to snuff out the gentle spark. Roaring how dares it.

But it continued in the rituals that nature had decreed are inalienable rights for all in celebration of their carefree days of youth.

And in assertion of such rights, the fickle flame contiuned the dance of youth, its fickle flame a defiant whisper against the raging storm.

Then the rain lashed down, a relentless drumbeat that threatened to extinguish the flame's fragile existence.

Yet, the candle light persevered, though sometimes flickering like a wounded heartbeat, the candle stood, its light a beacon of hope in the darkness, a testimony of the ever resilience human spirit.

As the storm's fury intensified, the candlelight’s delicate dance became its prayer to the heaven, a plea for the right to exist in nature’s fairness.

Sometimes the gusts buffeted the candle so hard that its wick was just a fragile thread suspended between life and death.

Even when its flame seemed a defiant gentle caress on the surrounding air, it was a poignant reminder of the transience of existence

Yet, the candle's light refused to be extinguished.

In the brief moments of calm between the tempests' violent outbursts, the candle's flame would steady, its gentle warmth a comforting presence in the turbulent night.

The shadows on the walls seemed to come alive, twisting and writhing like restless serpents.

Still, the candle's light held fast, a steadfast sentinel against the potent threats of encroaching darkness.

As the storm finally began to subside, the candle's flame, though battered and bruised, the candle's flame stood as a testament to the indomitable will to survive, a beacon of light in the face of adversity, the power of hope, the might of faith in faith, for all so fated.

And when the last wisps of the storm had dissipated, the candle's flame, now a steady golden glow, seemed to smile, its gentle warmth a reminder that even in the most turbulent of times, there is always a spark of hope to be found.

So, for all whose today is my turbulent yesterday, my message is: be brave; do not succumb to despair; have faith in yourself --- the self that is God’s greatest gift to the universe.

***NIHIL PLUS EXPLICANDUM***

ISBN 978-978-778-365-8